AVENGED: INSIDE THEIR MOST CAREER-DEFINING MOMENTS

METAL HAMMER

THE 50 GREATEST CULT BANDS

BATHORY, ACID BATH, TURA SATANA + MORE

HOW

SLIPKNOT

BECAME THE BAND OF THE DECADE

BLACK SABBATH
WEED, WAR AND MASTER OF REALITY

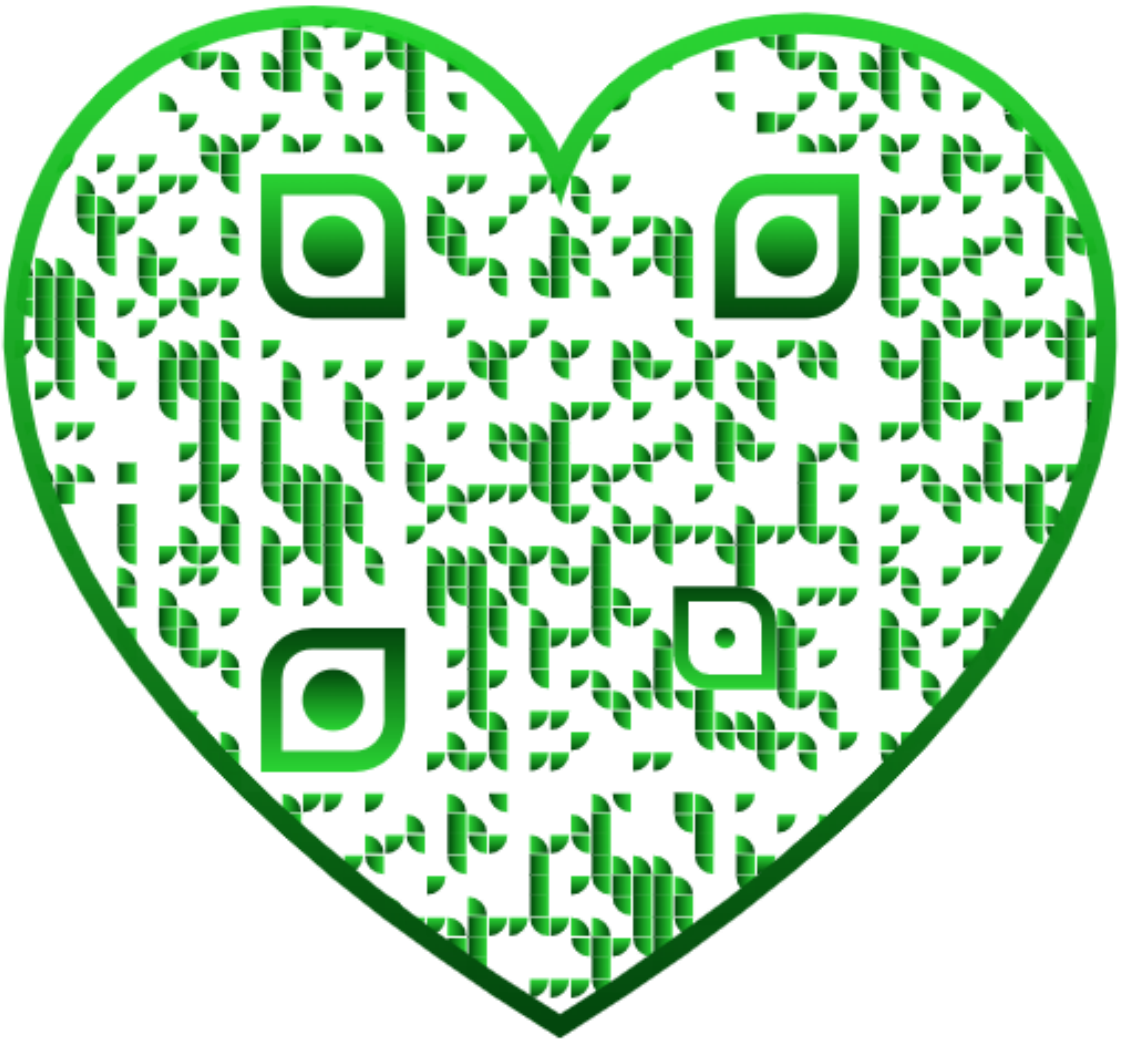
SPIRITBOX
IN THE STUDIO WITH COURTNEY

GYZE
MEET JAPAN'S BEST-KEPT SECRET

CANNIBAL CORPSE
CORPSEGRINDER'S OBSESSION: STUFFED TOYS?!

+ PERTURBATOR • WHILE SHE SLEEPS • EVILE • DEVIN TOWNSEND • TETRARCH • WARDRUNA

FUTURE
ISSUE 348



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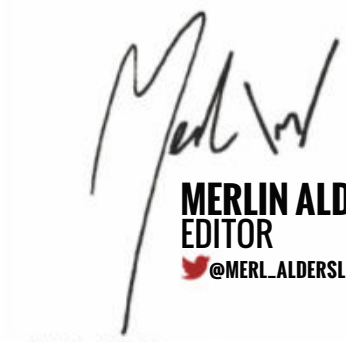
THE BAND OF THE DECADE

ALRIGHT, SO GOJIRA have actually been smashing the metal scene to pieces for *two* decades now, but it's undoubtedly in the last 10 years that they've graduated from being everyone's favourite cult band to becoming one of the single most vital, influential and utterly unstoppable bands of their generation. You can barely move for bands influenced by Gojira in 2021, and as the boys themselves make a triumphant return to remind everyone exactly how it's done, Deputy Editor Eleanor spent an afternoon with the Duplantier brothers for a fascinating conversation you won't find anywhere else.

Oh, and speaking of cult bands, this month we also put together a list of the 50 greatest cult bands ever. Metal has had its fair share of them, so we thought we'd look at the stories behind some of the very coolest. Add in the likes of Perturbator, Evile, While She Sleeps, Wardruna, Spiritbox, Cannibal Corpse and a whole lot more, and you've got a pretty swell issue in your hands! Enjoy.



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MEET THE BAND

ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR
El is *Hammer*'s Gojira mega-fan, so who better to catch up with Joe and Mario to find out what went into the making of the awesome *Fortitude*, and what goes into making a brotherly bond that lasts a lifetime? She also wrote this month's lead New Noise on the ace Gyze!

GABRIELLE DUPLANTIER
PHOTOGRAPHER
Think that Gojira's Joe and Mario are the only mega-talented Duplantiers in the family? Their sister Gabrielle is a top photographer, and she took the photos adorning this very month's cover feature. Some family gene pools get all the luck, it seems.

DANNII LEIVERS
WRITER
While She Sleeps have put out an absolute cracker of a new album, so we thought we'd punish them accordingly by having frontman Loz Taylor answer your questions. Fortunately, our Dannii was on hand to make sure things didn't get, um, out of hand.

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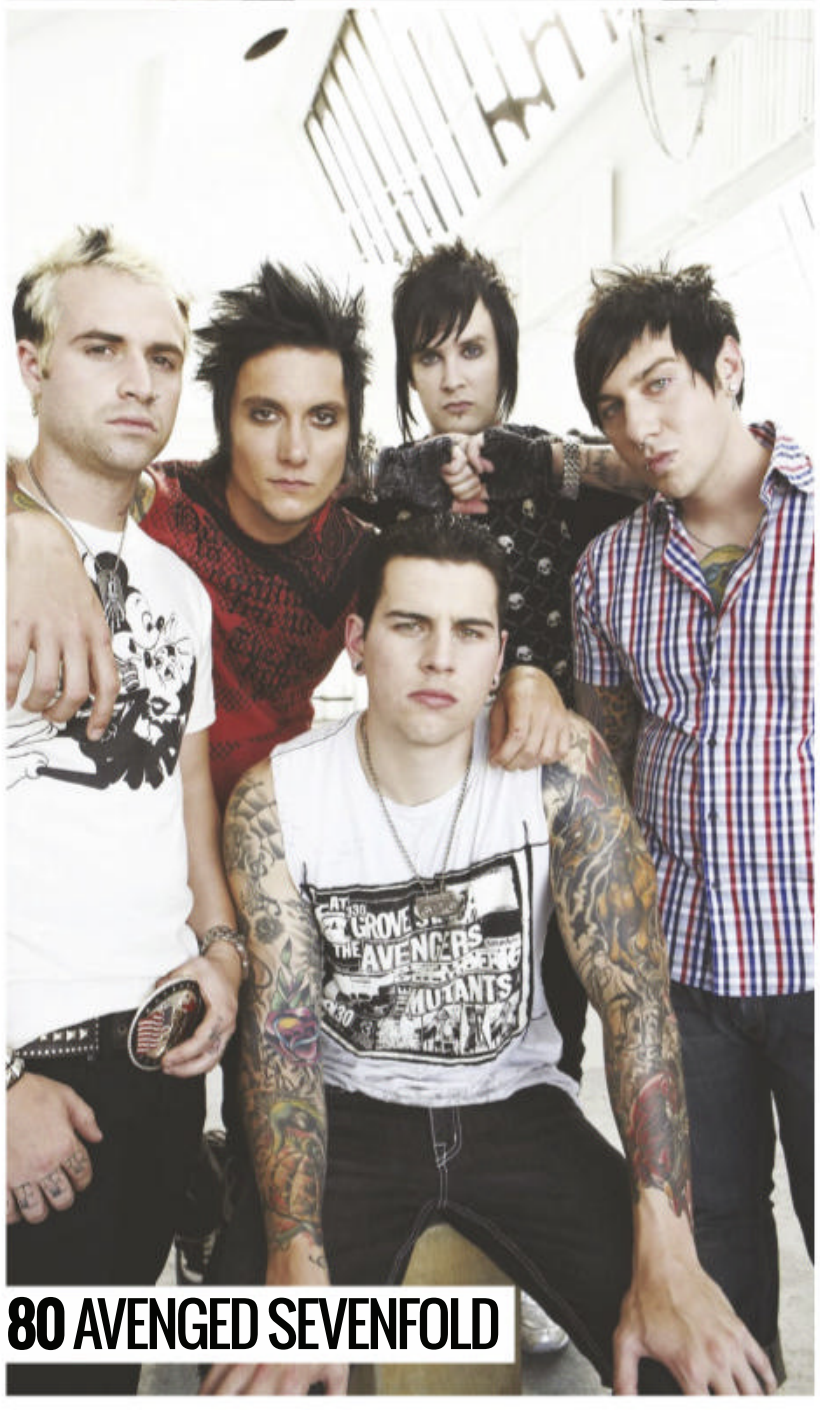

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THE BIG PICTURE

POPPY STANDS AND DELIVERS

SHE REMAINS A divisive figure in our world, but there can be no doubting that Poppy knows how to put on a hell of a spectacle. At an event that also saw guitar maestro Nita Strauss play the US national anthem, the genre-mashing singer-songwriter offered up an explosive performance for NXT: Stand & Deliver, one of the biggest WWE shows of the year. Metal and wrestling have long been comfortable bedfellows, but there can't have been many watching who were prepared for *Say Cheese*: a wild mix of bouncy pop punk, face-melting metal riffs, blastbeats and Poppy's disarming mix of cutesy cleans and skin-flaying shrieks. Macho Man chomping on Slim Jims, this most definitely ain't...

CHRIS GARRISON PHOTOGRAPHY

THE HOT TOPIC

FROM POISON TO VENOM

A new photobook by music photographer James Sharrock captures the first 10 years of Bullet For My Valentine and their rise to global fame

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: JAMES SHARROCK

Bullet For My Valentine were never going to be an underground band

JAMES SHARROCK HAS lived a life every bit as interesting as the subjects he shoots, from his early dreams of becoming a Jackaroo (a kind of trainee Australian cowboy) to shooting drag queens in the 90s and eventually working alongside some of the hottest bands on the planet, with his photos popping up everywhere from *Kerrang!* to *Classic Rock* to this very magazine. But no other band has captured his imagination quite so much as Bullet For My Valentine, and his work with them gave him a front-row seat to watch the Welsh band become – as he puts it – "one of the biggest metal bands to come out of Britain since Iron Maiden".

"When I first met Bullet in 2005 they were just kids – you can see in some of the photos, they're so *skinny*!" James laughs. "They were super-excited metalheads that had no idea what was coming for them."

Over the next decade, James would shoot Bullet for magazine features, at festivals and headline shows, and document their tours in places like New York, Australia, Siberia and South America. He has now curated his impressive library of images into the 200-page photobook *The Poison To Venom*, his stunning images offering an intimate view into the band's world and their journey from wide-eyed teenagers to the kind of band that could pack out venues around the world.

"We always stayed in touch and formed a good relationship," James says. "They have a real worldwide appeal and the fans go *nuts* wherever the band go."

Back in 2005, Bullet For My Valentine were just getting started, and James was sent to shoot them for *Kerrang!*. James was excited – he was following his dreams of becoming an established music photographer, having just relocated to London from Australia without so much as a concrete job offer or permanent place to stay.

"I was asked to go shoot a news feature for Bullet as they were just finishing *The Poison* with Colin Richardson – the same guy who did albums like Machine Head's *Burn My Eyes*," James says. "I found the Welsh had a very similar humour to the Australians, so we got on immediately."

The next 18 months saw both parties' career prospects explode as *The Poison* took the metal world by storm and James found himself in regular work, meeting ex-*Hammer* editor Alexander Milas, who would ultimately hire him as one of the magazine's foremost freelance photographers. During this time, James would bear witness to the first signs that Bullet were about to explode.

"It wasn't until the *Kerrang!* Tour in 2006 that you saw the response," James remembers. "They were on a fast-track up; the last show was at Brixton Academy and the response from the crowd was *huge*!"

Bullet were an affirmation that it had been the right choice for James to move to London, as he got in on the ground floor for one of the hottest new acts around. He also pivoted from

"THEY WERE SUPER-EXCITED METALHEADS THAT HAD NO IDEA WHAT WAS COMING FOR THEM"

photography to film when he filmed music videos for Bullet's songs *Raising Hell* – filmed at their practice space in Cardiff and inspired by "a classic Pantera video… just don't ask me which!" – and *Army of Noise*, filmed when the band toured South America.

"[Bullet] have a huge following in South America, so it was great going out and getting the crowd chanting before the band would come on. There was one venue they played in Rio, just off the Copacabana Beach, this small coliseum-like thing. There was a *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* vibe and the crowd was going nuts; just being in such a tropical place added excitement anyway and it just felt great."

The Poison To Venom's 200 pages promise to take fans from the tropical beaches of Australia and South America to colder climes in Siberia, and in front of millions of fans all around the world. Each image highlights the growth and change Bullet experienced in their 10-year journey, coming full-circle when they worked with Colin Richardson again on *Venom*. In that time, the band have surely worked with hundreds of photographers, but James has something nobody else did…

"I was the 'yarr' guy!" he laughs. "When they were trying to look badass and metal I'd go 'yarr!' like a pirate to make them laugh. Maybe that's why we ended up working together so much – they appreciated the sense of humour. I remember we were at one Russian show and in their changing room there was a sign saying 'Beware, Fans Behind Door' and there was also a big metal fan just outside the room… I went out, got one of the crowd members to pick it up and follow me – so this girl ends up bursting into their dressing room through that door, screaming and holding this enormous metal fan! It's almost dad humour, I suppose."

Maybe you had to be there… but James's book will make you feel like you were.

YOU CAN SUPPORT *THE POISON TO VENOM* AND GRAB A COPY ON CROWDFUNDER – VISIT WWW.THEPOISONTOVENOM.COM. IF THE PROJECT MAKES ITS GOAL OF 1,000 COPIES, JAMES ALSO PROMISES AN EXCLUSIVE DOCUMENTARY VIDEO OF FOOTAGE FROM OVER THE YEARS

THE SOUND OF METAL: PRESS/AMAZON STUDIOS

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

OUR PODCAST HAS A NEW THEME TUNE!
Cheers to the lads in Conjurer for recording it for us. Hear it now via all your usual Podcast platforms.

NU METAL IS COOL AGAIN
According to Mike Shinoda in a new interview, anyway. Although if you ask certain members of Team *Hammer*, it never went out of fashion.

ALTERNATIVELY, NU METAL WAS NEVER COOL
Or at least *Hybrid Theory* wasn't, if you ask Burton C. Bell, who thinks it was just Fear Factory "for kids". His words!

Burton C. Bell: fighting talk!

MEGADETH ARE IN THE NFT GAME
In related news, we still have no idea what NFT is, to be honest.

OZZY IS A WWE HALL OF FAMER
As if this year's Wrestlemania wasn't metal enough already.

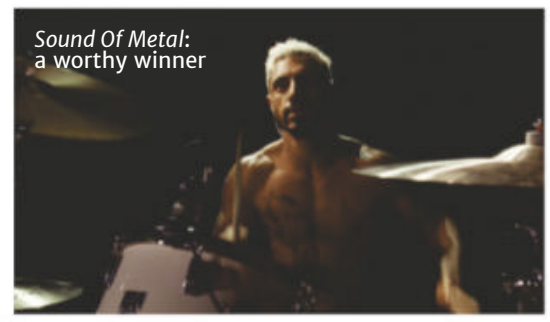
VREID MADE FOOTBALL METAL
The Norwegian black metallers have sponsored their local team, Sogndal FC.

TOOL'S LATERALUS TURNS 20 NEXT MONTH
Those anniversaries just keep coming…

THUNDER FORCE IS THE MOST METAL SUPERHERO FILM OF 2021
With a theme featuring Corey Taylor, Lzzy Hale, Scott Ian and Dave Lombardo, how could it not be?!

METAL SWEPT THE BAFTAS!
Well, nearly. Alright, so *Sound Of Metal* bagged a couple of gongs, but still. Woo!

THE PUBS ARE OPEN
Praise Satan! Ours is a pint.


Sound Of Metal: a worthy winner

WHO HAS THE BEST NICKNAME IN METAL?

While She Sleeps just dropped their killer fifth album, *Sleeps Society*, and frontman Loz Taylor is all set to face your questions

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

TWO YEARS AFTER their last album, 2019's experimental *So What?*, Sheffield's finest While She Sleeps are back with the even more ambitious *Sleeps Society*. We challenged frontman Loz Taylor to answer all your curious, insightful, and, erm, sometimes just downright weird questions.

When you look at how bands like Bring Me The Horizon and Architects have evolved and gone onto success, is it possible for heavy bands to break into the charts without softening their sound anymore?
Lizzie Mayersbeth (email)
"There's nothing more boring to me than a one-dimensional band. Bring Me are the kids that got absolutely slated for being pretty boy death metallers, but they've opened the doors and opened people's eyes to the fact you don't have to have long hair and a beard to like metal. When I was a kid, I just wanted to scream in a band and that was it. But what comes with trying to write heavy music, is writing music that's entertaining and can also sustain your career. It's a lot different to how it used to be – it has to reach all different corners now to make it sustainable."

I always loved the name Loz. What's the best nickname in metal?
Aidan Delaney (Facebook)
"The best? I don't know. I love Ozzy. He's always been an inspiration to me; he's cool as fuck. 'Ozzy' just seems to match his whole character. I always thought the worst nickname anyone could ever have would be Beans."

Hammer: Beans?
"Beans. I had this conversation once with Mat [Welsh, guitarist] about how he's forever dodged the 'ginge' nickname and how much he hates it because it's not a nickname who represents who you are, just 'cos you've got red hair. I agree with that but I said, 'Imagine if someone had nicknamed someone Beans.' It's just an awful nickname, innit? It reminds me of a snotty kid from a Beano comic, like, 'Oh shit, here comes Beans.'"

What is the strongest sense of inclusion you've felt as a fan of a particular band? Have you been part of any fan clubs, communities… things of that nature.
Rich (Facebook)
"I wasn't part of a fan club, I was in the fan club of trying to see as much possible music as I could. Even from an early age, rather than being an outsider looking in on other bands, I always wanted to be part of my own band. It was more about that than being in a fan club. The way I found new music was going out and paying to go to gigs, that's what I spent all my money on."

While She Sleeps: proudly DIY

If you compare [Sleeps' debut] *This Is The Six* to *So What?* and the singles from the new album, the sound has evolved and grown. How do you feel about the material on the first record versus what Sleeps are writing now?
George Willoughby (Facebook)
"While She Sleeps have always been that band that wanted to step outside the box. Although we came together for our love of metalcore, we've always had an undercurrent of the things you're hearing now. I figured I don't want to scream all the time. I'd like to try and develop a voice so I'm not just a shouty frontman. I agree, [the new material] is different but for us, inside the Sleeps bubble, it feels like a natural progression. We've got a philosophy in the studio that if it feels like it scares us, then we should probably just go for it."

What's your favourite song to play live?
@LAK_Ryan
"God, I can't remember playing live. I always loved playing *Death Toll* [from *This Is The Six*]. When we first wrote that song, we came out to it onstage and it's so explosive and heavy. Actually, someone sent me a video on Instagram a few days ago. He's in his bathroom listening to *Death Toll* and when it

“WE ALWAYS WANTED TO STEP OUTSIDE THE BOX”

Woah! That snake tatt is the most realistic one we’ve ever seen, Loz!

says, 'Death Toll', he shows me a Dettol bottle. Just a bit of funny info there. I'd literally never thought about it."

How's your voice at the moment?
Rose Phillips (email)
"When we recorded the record, to be quite honest, it was a bit of an up and down process for me. Everyone knows I've had my fair share of vocal problems, I've had three surgeries; it's not been an easy ride. A couple of years ago, I had some lessons with a vocal coach. It was almost like learning a different language. I'd been so used to screaming and singing the way I had, over years of touring I'd got into bad habits. It's hard to kick bad habits once they're there."

Hammer: Have you started singing cleans more often to take it easy on your voice?
"You can do just as much damage if you're not doing it right. For me, the move towards trying to do more singing is to progress as a musician. With screaming, there's almost a facade you can hide behind, but stripping that back and clean singing feels so much vulnerable. It's so much more personal. Maybe subconsciously, I'm trying to sing more because it might gain me a bit more longevity. As you get a bit older you realise you're not going to live forever, you can seriously damage yourself, and the throat surgeries are always in the back of my mind."

Besides *Party Hard* by Andrew WK, which metal bands/songs would you most want to hear at a party?
@MyticMindMedia
"Lamb Of God, *Redneck*. They're the band for me for club bangers that never get old. It's the groove. I'm in love with it. I remember when I was an emo kid, I used to go out to nightclubs on my own because a lot of the friends I had back then were a couple of years younger than me. I was like, 'I don't care, I'll make friends while I'm out.' What emo song did I used to go off to? *The Taste Of Ink* by The Used. But that's another song that's been rinsed. As soon as you hear, *'Is it worth it...'* you're like, 'Fucking hell, this song again…'"

How do you start the basic idea of a song?
@saeed543331
"Sean [Long, guitarist] usually comes over with a huge riff, shows it to the band and the song builds from that.

Loz is taking care of his voice... his only instrument until his guitar playing improves

It's rare it happens in any other way for us. I've only just started trying to learn to play guitar after all this time of being in a band. I told myself it's insane that I can't play an instrument and I'm in a band. Up until just before *So What?* I couldn't play anything, so I'd write my lyrics like poetry. I'd take lyrics to Shaun and that's how we lay down the foundations."

If you could bring back dinosaurs but you have to make one existing animal extinct, would you do it and what animal would you choose?
James Taylor (email)
"I'd bring one dinosaur back. I don't know if I'd bring back them all, because that would be crazy…"

Hammer: I think you either have to bring them all back, teeth and all, or nothing...
"That's scary shit that. OK, I'd probably make something like a crocodile extinct, because we already know what we know about crocodiles. It would be chaos, but the world is chaos anyway so we might as well have some dinosaurs involved."

Has being so DIY meant you're closer to making a full living off being in a band than before?
Andrew Olah (email)
"I think we'd still be making a living, but being DIY and taking on all the roles of looking after the band ourselves is definitely a positive move. Having to go through so many different people to get a job done that you know you can do yourself is one of the things that made us want to become an independent. The majority of the time, the people involved with your band are only in it so they can grab some cash off you. The band and the five dudes that are in it, you're the best people to represent your band and no one cares more about your band than you do."

If you were gonna give someone three albums to get into metal, what would you give them and why?
Jake Bremmer (email)
"*Slipknot* by Slipknot, because that was probably one of the first records I heard that melted my face and opened me up to so many other genres. Lamb Of God, *Sacrament*, because if you get into that groove, it'll help you get into metal a lot more. I feel like you can play basketball to Lamb Of God with how much bounce they've got. Rage Against The Machine, *The Battle Of Los Angeles*, because it has got *Testify* and *Guerrilla Radio* on it, a political message and that bouncy moshpit vibe." H

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THE SLAYLIST

STEVE VON TILL

The guitarist and co-vocalist of post-metal pioneers Neurosis has a record collection that's as diverse and mind-bending as you'd expect

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY • PICTURE: BOBBY COCHRAN

Steve Von Till: world's coolest teacher?

"THE BAND THAT became a part of my DNA, not necessarily stylistically, but part of how I identify as a rock fan, is **MOTÖRHEAD**. I was raised in a musical household, and my mom took me to see **KISS** when I was nine. But the raw energy of Motörhead really spoke to me. It wasn't this untouchable arena presentation, it was down-to-earth and gritty, and that's what I've always been attracted to. To this day, *Stay Clean* is the ringtone on my phone!

"As I got older and discovered punk in high school, **DISCHARGE**'s *Hear Nothing See Nothing Say Nothing* was mind-expanding. I didn't realise that guitars could sound like the radiation after a nuclear bomb! That debut is still one of my favourite albums if I'm feeling the need to listen to something hardcore. **JOY DIVISION** was also a game-changer. It opened my eyes to music that was just as much about what you don't play as what you do play. From a guitar player point of view, I've always loved *New Dawn Fades*.

"**LAUGHING HYENAS** are blues rock, but it's tortured, it's drug-fuelled, it's gnarly. I would start with *Everything I Want*. The guitar playing by Larissa [Strickland] was really unique; she didn't learn to play in any traditional way, it was all made up, with very unique stylings. I've always gravitated towards people who find their own sound and way of playing, rather than people who wanna be Randy Rhoads or Eddie Van Halen.

"I recently revisited the entire **CRASS** discography. It's hard to pick one song, but I'd go with *Mother Earth*. People think they're a crusty hardcore punk band screaming politics, but actually they're all about liberating your own mind from anybody else's way of thought. They didn't seem influenced by anything else, which goes with their whole ethos.

"I LIKE TO PLAY AMBIENT MUSIC TO MY FOURTH-GRADE STUDENTS"

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Check out Steve's mix at tinyurl.com/Hammer348Slaylist

"I love the concept of using the studio as an instrument. Adrian Sherwood from London and his On-U Sound Label had many incredible projects, and one album that was a big influence for me on the use of sound and creative mixing was **CREATION REBEL**'s *Starship Africa*, and the track *Space Movement 4*. I think Adrian was pretty early in using samples in a creative way, being able to reintroduce sounds into this kind of rhythmic bedrock, and I love doing that with my Harvestman project.

"I probably listen to ambient music more than any other genre at the moment. If I'm travelling, or in my classroom with my students – I teach fourth grade – I like to have it on. If I wanna go for influential, it has to be **BRIAN ENO**. I've slept to *Ambient 4* a million times on airplanes! What I love about the song *Lizard Point*, and this album in general, is that it's darker than a lot of his other ambient records, and I think it set the tone for what I would enjoy about bands like Coil.

"A current spin for me is **THE BUDOS BAND**. Al [Cisneros] from Sleep told me I needed to check them out. They sound like if somebody was really into Fela Kuti and Black Sabbath! It's all instrumental, with a horn section. I'd go with the song *Old Engine Oil*. It sounds like the most fun band to play in. I also think **WARDRUNA** are making some of the most important music in recent years. As a kid in California I was interested in Ancient European folklore and pre-Christian, earth-based spirituality. I wondered who the people were that built the stone circles, what did they think, what was their outlook on the universe. Somehow, Einar Selvik was able to channel a reference to the past, to these ancient, obscure ideas, and channelled it into something new and compelling. *Helvegen* is probably their most popular song, and it sticks in your brain. When I first heard Wardruna, it was one of these moments like, 'This is what I've always wanted to hear.'

"Then, sometimes, you just need rock'n'roll to save you. You know those days where shit feels weird, but you get a bit of sunshine, get in the car and crank something up and it makes everything okay? For me, that's *Pet Sematary* by **RAMONES**. It just lifts me up." H

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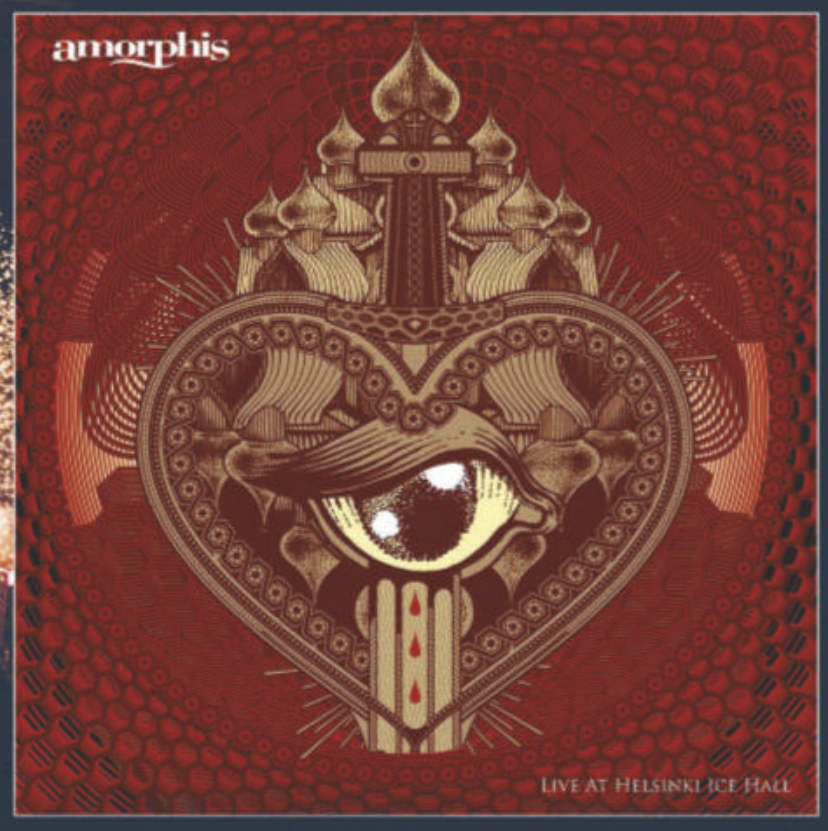

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LIFE LESSONS

GEORGE ‘CORPSEGRINDER’ FISHER

The Cannibal Corpse frontman on horror films, headbanging and, er, claw machines

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: ALEX MORGAN

GEORGE ‘CORPSEGRINDER’ FISHER

was born to sing death metal. A giant with cascading hair, a V8-throated roar and a neck engineered for headbanging, you can see why he’s fronted brutal death metallers Cannibal Corpse for 25 years. Their new, 15th album, *Violence Unimagined*, proves yet again that metal is rarely as punishing as when Corpsegrinder is involved, seething from start to finish. But away from the mic, the frontman’s heart beats just as much for charity and claw machines as it does for horrifying music…

FAKE IT UNTIL YOU MAKE IT

“When I was learning how to sing I was just in my room listening to records. I had a piece of wood – a support board from under my bed – so I’d take that and use it as my ‘guitar’! Ha ha! My friends called it the ‘Rickenboarder’, instead of the Rickenbacker. Me and my brother shared a room in our house, and on the walls I’d tape all the lyrics sheets from my records, put the album on and just go! I wanted to sound like whoever I was listening to. I pretty much sang every single day. People always ask me about technique, but I basically pounded my voice into submission!”

DEATH WERE ONE OF THE BEST TO EVER DO IT

“I went and saw Death play, and it changed everything for me. It was right before *Leprosy* came out [in 1988] and there were, like, 50 people at this show. It was a short stage and I was standing right in front of Chuck [Schuldiner]. I could have literally walked right up to him and said, ‘Hey, what’s up?’ I’d already heard Death records, but the way he could scream live made me go, ‘This is the way I want to sing.’ The long, high screams that people know me for in Cannibal Corpse, the biggest part of that is Chuck Schuldiner.”

FLORIDA DEATH METAL DIDN’T FEEL GAME-CHANGING

“Think about this: Morbid Angel are still around, Deicide are still around, Obituary are still around, Cannibal Corpse are still around, Florida death metal’s still going! But when I first came to Florida in 1990, I wasn’t thinking about it like that. I wasn’t thinking, ‘Wow, this is something special.’ It hadn’t really hit yet. It was just about doing a band, making music and playing shows. I wasn’t thinking about how magical it all was because me and my band, Monstrosity, were just trying to be players in the game. But, by ’93, it was on everyone’s mind. That’s when Monstrosity relocated to Tampa and started meeting big bands like Cannibal Corpse.”

I DIDN’T CHANGE WHEN I JOINED CANNIBAL CORPSE

“When I went from Monstrosity to Cannibal, the crowd size went out the window – I jumped from playing to 1,000 people to 5,000. When we went to Europe together for the first time, it was crazy. But I still did the same thing as I did in Monstrosity. I just headbanged and sang. That’s all I did and I took that into Cannibal. I probably talk more onstage now but, in the end, I still headbang and yell at people! Ha ha!”

NO ONE CAN HEADBANG BETTER THAN ME

“I try to be humble, but you have to be the best at something. I’ve said onstage, ‘Try to keep up with me. You will fail.’ I’ve seen some kids hold their own. There are some in the front row [saying], ‘I can beat you!’ It’s a fun game and, I wouldn’t say they’re better than me, but there are competent headbangers out there. Headbanging at the start of *I Cum Blood* is my signature part, so there are some great kids out there, but I’d never say anyone beat me.”

DEATH METAL DOESN’T RUN IN THE FAMILY

“My oldest daughter will be 17 this year, my youngest 15. They’re not into Cannibal Corpse. My youngest plays *Minecraft* and she’ll listen to the *Harry Potter* soundtrack, or she might play to one or two Dragonforce songs. I don’t think they’re into music in the same way I was. My youngest sings chorus though, and she’ll sing to Japanese Vocaloid music. She’s the big one music-wise, but metal? Cannibal Corpse? No, I don’t think so.”

GOOD SONGWRITING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN TECHNICALITY

“In death metal, you need to have a sick vocalist – obviously, coming from me – and some good songs. If you’re playing in a band, for me, it’s not about speed or how technical you are. If you have technical songs that have a great structure, then I’ll listen to it. I don’t need one song with five million riffs to show me how great you are. There are people who can play circles around anyone else in the world, and they write great songs as well. And there are so many different styles you can think about: Obituary, Morbid Angel, Death and Deicide are the biggest bands in the genre, and all four are totally different. They all have their own style as far as death metal goes, and I love all of them. Cannibal had more groovy shit. Their parts were more slamming than a lot of the other bands; Morbid Angel were more about speed and precision. In the end, I just want [to hear] something memorable – and if the singer’s great, that helps.”

PLAYING TO A CROWD OF JUGGALOS IS BRILLIANT

“Playing The Gathering Of The Juggalos, that was something different, 100%. There was some backlash and people gave us a hard time. But, if you don’t like it, too bad. We do what we wanna do and, you know what, they treated us great. The fans were great to us. I don’t think they knew us, but I’ve heard the stories: if they don’t like you, they let you know! People were body slamming and there were shopping carts in the pit. It was wild!”

MY FAVOURITE GUEST PERFORMANCE? SUICIDE SILENCE

“We did a tour with Suicide Silence and Black Dahlia Murder in South America. We had a day off so we went to the bar, and I was talking to Dan Kenny [bassist] and Mitch [Lucker, their former singer who passed away in 2012]. They asked me about

“I DONATE STUFFED ANIMALS TO CHARITY”

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Corpsegrinder: headbanging overlord

doing a guest spot on a record, but they were downplaying themselves: 'I know we're not traditional death metal…' Listen, they're death metal, it's just a different style. I told them I'd do it, and then of course Mitch passed away. I remember him saying I was a big influence and it'd be an honour for me to do it, so that one is near and dear to my heart."

DO MORE FOR CHARITY

"I once won 12 prizes in a row from a claw machine. That's my biggest haul. I've done tours where almost every truck stop has a claw machine – if it doesn't, I'm disappointed! I've done tours where I've had three garbage bags full of stuffed animals I've won. Most of the stuff I win I donate to my daughters' elementary school or the mall by my house. There was one lady collecting toys to sell and raise money for St. Jude's [a children's hospital in Memphis]. I gave her four garbage bags full of stuffed animals I'd won. She was almost crying!"

WATCH MORE SLASHER FILMS

"Erik Rutan [Cannibal Corpse's new guitarist] and I, when we were touring last year, we'd watch loads of horror movies. There's a slasher film called *Madman*. I saw it when I was young and I loved it! There's one called *Don't Go In The House*, which has one crazy scene in it that, in today's world, some people would be pissed off by. A guy clubs this girl, knocks her out, and he's built this fireproof room. He hangs her up there nude, throws gas on her and lights her with a blowtorch. It's just insanely brutal! Watch it with your daughters. Once we get back on tour, hopefully me and Rutan will watch some more – the wife doesn't wanna watch that stuff."

MAKE YOUR BEST MATES YOUR BANDMATES

"Erik was basically the sixth member of the band. We'd known him for so long and he's produced so many of our records. When I did vocals for [animated series] *Metalocalypse*, I did them at Erik's studio. So he was a natural choice for me, and for Alex [Webster, bass] and Paul [Mazurkiewicz, drums]. I've been in the lowest points of my life as far as recording goes, where my voice just isn't working right, and he'll come in, put an arm on my shoulder and go, 'Hey. You're the man. Don't get down on me.' Super-positive, ha ha! I love recording with him, I love touring with him, he's already been in two legendary bands [Morbid Angel and Hate Eternal], he's toured with Pantera – when we needed a new guitarist, no one else even came to mind."

"SEEING DEATH PLAY CHANGED EVERYTHING FOR ME"

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EMANZIPATION

PRESENTS

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IN THE STUDIO

SPIRITBOX

These genre-splicing Canadians set the internet ablaze – now they're getting ready to take over with their debut full-length

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: JASON MAGEAU

Courtney LaPlante: dishing up some gems in the dining room

THEY'VE RACKED UP millions of streams on YouTube with singles *Holy Roller* and *Constance* and are considered to be one of metal's hottest new bands – and they haven't even released an album yet. But pandemic be damned: Spiritbox made a dash for the border to ensure we get one of metal's most hotly tipped records before 2021 is through.

It seems like you've been sitting on the songs for this record for a while…
Courtney LaPlante (vocals): "Yeah, between winter 2019 and spring 2020 we'd done a few writing sessions, ahead of our first tour in February/March. But like everyone else, we had to put our plans on hold. We eventually realised the only way we could record this with our team was for us to come to them."

Where are you recording?
"It is called… the dining room of our producer's house in Joshua Tree! Ha ha! Our producer Dan [Braunstein] lives in LA and decided to take everything from the studio and load it into his little electric car – that we were *sure* wasn't going to make it to Joshua Tree – and we set everything up in the dining room."

Recording out in the desert must work well for the atmosphere of your songs?
"It's so cool – we're on this big 20-acre ranch with a mountain as the backyard! We all live in condos in the city, so coming here, it was so silent that it creeped me out. I figured I'd be like, 'Ooh I'm at one with nature', but it was *scary* – at night it was so dark that the moon would illuminate the mountain and all you could see were rocks, like the start of a scary movie. But it's also beautiful."

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
1

STUDIO:
Producer's home studio, Joshua Tree, USA

PRODUCER:
Dan Braunstein

EXPECT:
Boundary-pushing metal experimentalism with an ear for blockbuster-worthy atmospherics

How did the recording process compare to your experiences with your former band iwrestledabearonce?
"In iwrestledabearonce everybody wrote and recorded their own thing and it was very compartmentalised. For this, we recorded simultaneously so all these little puzzle pieces would be put together at the end. This method really worked for me; it was a lot less anxiety-inducing because I realised I was around people who I was comfortable with. We also built the songs together, which made me realise there's no scary person with a big red button so when they don't like something… BZZZT!"

How did the success of *Holy Roller* affect your approach to the record?
"That song was never supposed to be a single! We were pissed off we couldn't record the album and it was the only song we were happy with that had been developed on demos. It was just fun: we wanted to put out a banger, an aggressive song. I'm not sure we'll ever do a song like that again, but we wanted to tell people, 'We'll do whatever we want and if you don't like that, listen to something else.'"

What themes and ideas have inspired this new record?
"When I'm writing, it takes me a while to self-analyse. A couple months later, I'll realise what the songs are about. A lot of this record is about dealing with my depression, communicating with people and not wanting any confrontation, so the songs are a way of me having those confrontations."

What is the biggest change in the songs over this past year?
"I had a polyp on my vocal cords for eight years, but this year I had a check-up and it's gone. I've only ever recorded stuff with this injury and it's something I'd gotten used to – to losing bits of tone and range. But all the excuses I put on myself for why I couldn't do this or that aren't true anymore. It's liberating."

What would you say is the biggest theme running through the record?
"The unifying theme is fluidity. I want a record that somebody will listen to all the way through and enjoy as a body of work, rather than just a few singles. The only people we've shown so far are my parents and of course they're like, 'This is *the best*! You're going to win *all* the Grammys!' But the real test is going to be when everyone else hears it. It's time to rip the band-aid off!" H

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THE STORY BEHIND

HYPERDRIVE!

DEVIN TOWNSEND & ANNEKE VAN GIERSBERGEN

Originally a *Ziltoid* deep-cut, *Hyperdrive!* became a much-loved euphoric anthem with the addition of Anneke on vocals – and would also pave the way for a wonderful partnership

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

WHEN IT COMES to collaborations, few recent examples have elicited as much unbridled joy as the music Devin Townsend and Anneke van Giersbergen have made together. From the moment we first heard Anneke's voice soaring over Devin's glorious riffs on 2009's *Addicted* album, it was clear that this Dutch-Canadian crossover was, and is, a match made in heaven. *Addicted* was an album that revealed a new and disarmingly accessible side to Devin's music, while showcasing a newly formed partnership that's since proved to be both enduring and highly productive. Speaking to them both on the now-obligatory Zoom call, *Hammer* discovers that their working together seems to have been an inevitability.

"I knew of Anneke and The Gathering because Strapping Young Lad were signing to the same label," Devin recalls. "I remember being played *Mandylion* in a car in LA, and thinking, 'Fuck, that is *so good*!' I listened to it over and over and over again. The thing about Annie's voice that appealed to me so much was it was super-strong, super-pure and super-confident but without having to be anything other than what it was. There was nothing about it that was indirect, and I really, really liked that, because I hadn't heard that before."

THE FACTS

RELEASED: 2009

ALBUM: *Addicted*

PERSONNEL: Devin Townsend (vocals, guitar, keyboards) Anneke van Giersbergen (vocals) Ryan Van Poederooyen (drums) Brian 'Beau' Waddell (bass) Mark Cimino (guitar)

"I knew Devin from his work with Steve Vai and from Strapping Young Lad, I knew all his work," Anneke grins. "We went to a concert when he played with Strapping in Nijmegen, and he came into the audience and he walked right past me, but I didn't dare touch him on the shoulder! Ha ha ha! I was a little bit shy. But that's way before I started out on my solo career and did a cover of a Ziltoid song…"

Devin and Anneke's relationship began with a single song: *Hyperdrive!* Originally released on Devin's 2007 concept album *Ziltoid The Omniscient*, it was a feisty and memorable deep cut that added a little depth and emotional heft to what was, in reality, a record about a rubber-faced alien freak with flatulence issues and a dangerous coffee habit. Meanwhile, Anneke had just left The Gathering and embarked on a career as a solo artist. Eager to play live, she was aware that she didn't have a vast number of her own songs to perform, and so an idea was hatched.

"I didn't really have an oeuvre yet, so I wanted to have some cool cover songs in the set. I love Devin's music, so we did *Hyperdrive!*. We played it on tour in Santiago, Chile, in 2009 and it was our opening song. There was a YouTube clip of it, and I thought, 'This looks cool because there's a lot of people there and they're all cheering! So maybe I could send this to Devin, to let him know that I'm alive and to let him know that I appreciate his music so much.'"

"When I saw the cover she'd done of *Hyperdrive!*? Well, God hates a coward, right?" Devin laughs. "So I sent her an email, 'Hey there, my name's Dev! Wanna come and sing on my shit?' Like most of us, I try to be as aware of my intuition as possible. I'd like to say it was premeditated in a way that's more clever than it actually was, but I woke up one day and thought, 'Wow, she sounds great and she's singing one of my songs and that means she's at least aware of me, so what's her email?' Ha ha!"

"I remember the first phone call," says Anneke. "We had a really bad connection because I'd just moved to the middle of nowhere, so I had to stand way out in the garden and Devin was breaking up really terribly! But eventually we got talking, and we were talking about kids and music and family and we had so much in common. Within weeks or months I was travelling to Canada to join him in the studio and that was amazing."

The second part of a sprawling, four-album conceptual extravaganza about a cheeseburger, *Addicted* was recorded in the summer of 2009 and released that November. It was instantly hailed

PRESS/ASHLEY MAILE

Anneke and Devin: the dream team

as a classic by Devin's rabid army of admirers, with Anneke's vocals routinely singled out as one of the album's most mesmerising selling points. In particular, a new version of *Hyperdrive!* provided *Addicted* with a profound moment of hands-in-the-air euphoria; its rousing refrain of *'Every day's a new day!'* sounding even more powerful and poignant than before.

"When I wrote it, my wife and I had just had our son, about 15 years ago, and there was a transition period probably similar to what Annie was going through, where I'd left Strapping Young Lad and I was trying to re-evaluate my life," says Devin. "So the whole idea of *'Every day's a new day'* is a bittersweet thing, because on some level you're starting a new life as a father and into sobriety or whatever your scene is, but you're leaving behind a whole other life, in a sense. Although it was the healthy thing to do, there is also a sense of melancholy to that, I think, that really underpins it."

"As a listener, everyone can put their own story into it, but it's a very positive song," adds Anneke. "The music really fits the lyrics. The funny thing is, the Ziltoid version is more mellow and soft, and the version we did together is very powerful, but both are uplifting."

Although Devin has always placed melody front and centre in the vast majority of his music, the succinctness and sweetness of the crushing but catchy tunes on *Addicted* went down so well that many may have expected him to repeat the trick for the follow-up. Unfortunately, despite being thrilled by what he and Anneke had achieved, the next part of the cheeseburger-themed concept quadrilogy – the mutant, extreme prog metal nightmare of 2011's *Deconstruction* – was already slithering down the pipeline.

"I wish sometimes I could control how this all works, because then maybe I could follow up an album like *Addicted* with something similar and start a trajectory that could get some momentum," Devin shrugs. "Because I remember when *Addicted* was done, the label and manager were like, 'That's great, we'll take more of *that*!' But the next album was *Deconstruction*, and when I delivered that, they were like, 'But we had choruses and now we don't!' Ha ha! But I never try to manipulate the flow into a way that's more commercial. When it becomes clear that there's a commercial slant to it, then I'm genuinely excited!"

Since recording *Addicted*, Devin and Anneke have worked and toured together on multiple occasions. In particular, they both point to 2012's much-praised *Epicloud* album as a great

"I LOOK UP TO DEVIN BUT I ALSO LOVE HIM AS A FRIEND"

ANNEKE VAN GIERSBERGEN

Geography sucks, but we will hopefully get new music from these two again soon

"ANNIE'S VOICE IS SUPER-STRONG, SUPER-PURE AND SUPER-CONFIDENT"

DEVIN TOWNSEND

example of the intense creativity that erupts when they join forces.

"Devin is *really* fast-working," Anneke smiles. "When I'm in Canada, we don't waste any time, so I get there super-jet-lagged, we get coffee and I start singing. We do 12-hour days for four days then I go home and I don't know who I am anymore! Ha ha! But when I hear it back it always sounds amazing. Devin has a great ear. When he hears me singing, he knows what my range is, what my abilities are. So when he writes parts for me, he knows exactly what I'm able to do. Not a lot of people can do that. It's great chemistry."

"Annie does this thing that happens with her voice at a certain range," Devin interjects. "Not at the *top* of her range, but at three-quarters of her range, there's this spot that is so powerful. She does it on *Angel* from *Epicloud*. And when she was singing it I remember thinking, 'Yeah, she's a warrior! She's badass!' When she hit that note, man, you don't fuck with that. *Ever*."

Back in the rubbish here and now, Devin and Anneke are clearly separated by geography for the foreseeable. Nonetheless, the magic that happens when they make music together is undeniable and both insist that they will grab every opportunity to do it all again. After all, every day's a new day.

"I always learn so much from Devin," Anneke concludes. "Whenever we meet, I pick his brains about everything, about ways to record music, about production, songwriting, singing and performing. I look up to him but I also love him as a friend. When Devin needs me, he can always ask and I'll always be there, and vice versa."

"I think our relationship has evolved in a wonderful way," adds Devin. "It's a shame we live on opposite sides of the planet, because it makes the logistics difficult. But she has been involved in some of my most magical moments. Talking about this now, I realise how thankful I am for her participation in my music. It's been such an honour. To have that voice singing on my dumb songs has been really wonderful." H

ANNEKE'S *THE DARKEST SKIES ARE THE BRIGHTEST* AND DEVIN'S *DEVOLUTION SERIES #1 – ACOUSTICALLY INCLINED* ARE BOTH OUT NOW VIA INSIDEOUT MUSIC

PRESS

SUPERNATURAL WEEK

EVERY NIGHT 9PM FROM 15TH-22ND MAY

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY
CHRISTINE
SINISTER
FLATLINERS
THE QUIET ONES
THE DEVIL'S CANDY
FIRST BORN
IT FOLLOWS

horrorchannel

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YOUR SHOUT

MUTTER IS OVERRATED

Plus other ridiculous opinions, curious queries and fiery takes you fired at us this month

Rammstein's *Mutter*: the mother of all albums?

RAMM IT DOWN

Mutter turning 20 makes me feel old but it was awesome reliving that era in the last issue. Can we get similar stories for *Iowa* and *Lateralus* please? Those three albums together basically soundtracked my teenage years!
Liam Phillips (email)

Yeah, us too. Still, no harm in the occasional bout of celebratory nostalgia, right? On that note, *Iowa* and *Lateralus*… OK, you've definitely got us thinking big.

WHAT'S THE MUTTER?

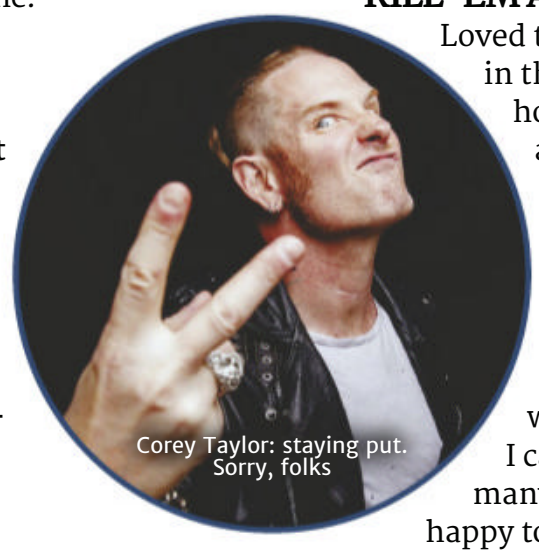
Controversial take: *Mutter* is vastly overrated and isn't even in Rammstein's top three albums. I know it's got all the singles but for me, they've just got better and better since then and the last album was (genuinely) the best thing they've done.
Tim Wilson (email)

That is certainly a controversial take. And almost definitely wrong. Sorry. Although Deputy Ed Eleanor will back you about that last album – and to be fair, it *is* world class.

COREY TIME

It is 2021 and I am still seeing stories on *Metal Hammer*'s website about Corey Taylor's latest opinion. Why? Why are you doing this to us? Please stop.
David James (Facebook)

It is 2021 and people are still moaning about Corey Taylor! Come on, guys, if you haven't worked out he's not going anywhere by now, we really can't help you.


Corey Taylor: staying put. Sorry, folks

KILL 'EM ALL

Loved the *Killers* feature in the last issue, however I disagree about Maiden fans at the time being fed up by the songs having been out a little while. As a fan who was there, I can confirm many of us were happy to have them committed to a proper record!
Billy Warran (email)

In our defence, we never said *all* fans were dismayed at the lack of 'new' material on *Killers*. Anyway, the point is, it turned out pretty alright for Iron Maiden in the end. And *Killers* is class.

LEE WAY

The Evanescence feature last month gave me life. Amy's been through so much and I'm so happy she's come through it all OK, and with an amazing album with Evanescence. Respect our queen, please!
Gemma Butler (email)

Amy's one of the best, and Evanescence put out a strong record this year. By the time we finally get to see those Evanescence/Within Temptation shows, we should be in for a proper treat!

RIP LG

Thanks for having LG in the issue last month. I was absolutely gutted by his passing – Entombed were the band that got me into death metal and he seemed like

#TWEETS

ICE Cold Fact: At some point you will realize that worrying about OTHER people's business.. Does absolutely NOTHING positive for YOUR life.. At all.
Ice T (@FINALLEVEL)

It is a pleasure to sing on the new @whileshesleeps song, Nervous. Love those boys. Check it out right now. It's fucking bangin'!xxx
Simon Neil (@BiffyClyro)

From now on, all concerts will be 1000% out of body experiences. Everyone in attendance must rock like there is no tomorrow. Deal?
Alissa White-Gluz (@AWhiteGluz)

Tell you what, nothing brings you out of a guitar-rut like learning some @gloryhammer
Serena Cherry (@whatacoolfridge)

I'm fascinated with the ridiculous names of suburban developments. Most sound like horror movies. Nearby us, there is a planned community called "King's Contrivance."
Neil Fallon (@npfallon)

ERIK HACKEN SCHMIDT/PRESS

Spiritbox: telling it like it is

the nicest dude. I think *Wolverine Blues* will be getting some more plays over the next few weeks…
Jason Simpson (email)

LG's loss is one that reverberated all the way through the metal community, and Entombed's impact on metal itself is immeasurable. We'll miss him.

WAAAAAAH-MMYS

Respect to Ice-T but is Body Count really the best choice for a Best Metal Grammy in 2021? In a world where you have Code Orange, it's just wrong. I'd even take Poppy winning if it meant we got something young, fresh and different on the stage.
Luke Edwards (email)

We love us some Body Count, but we can't fault your argument that Code Orange or Poppy would have been a little more, um contemporary. Although did anyone see that Post Malone performance? We're just saying: Rob Halford might be wondering where one of his jackets is.

BOXING CLEVER

Please keep up the Spiritbox love! I love these guys and it's so nice to see Courtney up front and centre in metal media telling it like it is. We need more like her!
Tessa Vaughn (email)

We agree! Spiritbox rule, and so does Courtney. In fact, we catch up with Spiritbox over on p.20 to see how their new album is coming along…

THE SHOW MIGHT GO ON?

Is it bad that I'm starting to finally get my hopes up that we might get some festivals before summer is all said and done? I've booked my ticket for Bloodstock anyway – just saying.
Nikki Barker (email)

We have every single digit crossed for this one. Just how good will that first beer in that field be if we can get to Bloodstock in August?

THE BIG DEBATE

When *Metal Hammer* veteran and walking Iron Maiden encyclopedia Dom Lawson ranked Maiden's albums, it was like a grenade had been tossed into our Facebook comments sections.

HE SAID

"Only a controversial choice for the No.1 slot if you've made the terrible mistake of thinking that *Flash Of The Blade* isn't one of the greatest heavy metal songs of all time, *Powerslave* is better than perfect. If that's a thing."

YOU SAY

Brave New World is by far my favourite! I think the guitar solo in *Brave New World* itself has been my ringtone since I had a phone that was capable of playing it!
Leah Moorhouse (Facebook)

I'd never in a million years have put *Somewhere In Time* so high. But I'm guilty of overlooking it, and you know what – you're right. It's brilliant. I wonder if I'm the only one who overlooks it in favour of *Powerslave* or *Seventh Son*?
Andrew Brown (Facebook)

Seems *Metal Hammer* sent out 'The Assassin' for *No Prayer For The Dying*. Absolutely love the album. However, asking to rank Iron Maiden albums from worst to best is a cruel thing to do.
Sandro Morghan (Facebook)

There are two types of people in this world: those that think *Powerslave* is Iron Maiden's best album and those who are wrong.
Paul O'Neal (Facebook)

I don't see how its possible to rate Iron Maiden albums from best to worst. They have so many great albums.
Jimmy Lambert (Facebook)

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

GOJIRA
Fortitude
"A band that refuses to settle for anything but greatness."
MERLIN ALDERSLADE
EDITOR

GOJIRA
Fortitude
"Still crushingly heavy. Still raising the bar."
ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR

DORDEDUH
Har
"Elemental, spine-tingling majesty from Romania's metal visionaries."
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

GOJIRA
Fortitude
"*GOJIRAAAAAAAA! *raises claw**"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

GOJIRA
Fortitude
"It's so great to have Gojira back. What an album!"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

MONSTER MAGNET
A Better Dystopia
"'Cos if ever the world needed a bunch of acid-fried 60s covers, it's now."
DAVE EVERLEY
ONLINE EDITOR

GOJIRA
Fortitude
"So happy these lads are back!"
HANNAH-MAY KILROY
FREELANCE NEWS EDITOR

PRESS

NEW NOISE

GYZE

These Japanese folk metallers are bringing the sound of the Imperial Court to metal

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: LITCHI

Gyze: say Konnichiwa to one of your new favourite bands

‘KONNICHIWA! SAYONARA! ITADAKIMASU!’

When festivals come back, these are the chants that’ll be ringing out: hello, goodbye and, er, a before-eating pleasantry of ‘thank you for the meal’. The anthem *Samurai Metal*, from Japanese folk metallers Gyze, is sprinkled with easy vocabulary for audience participation, in the way of Korpiklaani’s *Beer Beer* or Finntroll’s *Trollhammaren*. In the meantime, there’s a ridiculous video to keep us entertained, featuring the band wielding instruments and drawing weapons, alongside guest appearances from old touring buddies Dragonforce and Battle Beast. It’s very silly. And exactly what we need in 2021.

“We wanted something for the European metal festivals – it’s really funny! And really unique. And it will make people happy, I think!” laughs frontman Ryoji Shinomoto, speaking via Zoom from his home in Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan’s main islands. Today, it’s so snowy that the trains have stopped running.

Ryoji, his drummer brother Shuji and bassist Shogo Hikawa formed the band Suicide Heaven in 2009, and later moved from Hokkaido to Tokyo to pursue their dreams of metal stardom with a huge company. But those dreams stalled when they were put under pressure to change their sound to pop. In March 2011, a major earthquake and tsunami struck Thoku in northeast Japan, killing more than 15,000 people, triggering the Fukushima nuclear disaster and putting Gyze’s situation into perspective: you only get one shot at life, so why spend it being unhappy?

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
A fusion of epic European power metal with impressive Japanese classical music

FOR FANS OF:
Dragonforce, Wagakki Band, Korpiklaani

LISTEN TO:
Samurai Metal

“I watched the news. Everyone was dying and it touched my heart,” Ryoji remembers.

They returned to Hokkaido and changed their name to Gyze, pronounced ‘Ghee-zay’ – after the hair salon owned by the Shinomoto brothers’ father. Ryoji doesn’t know the origin of the name, except that it references the Egyptian city of Giza and the beautiful pyramids it houses, but the most important thing is that it’s a connection to the family he loves.

Starting afresh, Gyze recruited new bassist Aruta Watanabe and emulated their Scandinavian melodeath and European power metal heroes, releasing exhilarating debut album *Fascinating Violence* in 2013, followed by *Black Bride* in 2015. That year, Ryoji was overjoyed to play an Asian tour and Japanese festival Loud Park with Children Of Bodom. He was greatly saddened to learn of Alexi Laiho’s death last December. “I was shocked,” he says. “But honestly, he can die but his music’s still alive. I am really influenced from his style – *his* ideas, his live feeling in my brain, and I will make new music. My music is influenced from his music, so his music will never die.”

They continued touring and making music, but three years ago they realised that lots of Japanese bands were taking on European sounds: they needed to find their own style. Enter: gagaku – classical music that was played in the Imperial court from around the 6th century, and at major Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Bringing in the flute, stringed instruments such as the koto, shamisen and the Chinese erhu, along with violin and cello, Gyze took inspiration from notable composers: Akira Ifukube of the Godzilla franchise, and Joe Hisaishi, who has scored classic Studio Ghibli movies such as *Howl’s Moving Castle* and *My Neighbor Totoro*.

“I really like power metal, like Helloween and Dragonforce, and also I really like film music. Do you know Studio Ghibli? Their film music has a Japanese atmosphere, but he uses Western instruments. We wanted to write like that with heavy metal.”

They’re now four albums into their career, and have written lyrics capturing the expansive landscapes and indigenous culture of Hokkaido (2017’s *Northern Hell Song*), as well as World War II (2019’s *Asian Chaos*). Before *Samurai Metal*, they were a ‘serious’ band. It was the onset of the pandemic, and the ensuing mental

health challenges facing people worldwide, that prompted Ryoji to take the band's music in another, more irreverent, direction. "Honestly, funny stories are not my style," he admits. "We always make serious songs, with lyrics about world wars. But just we wanted to make something new."

Gyze are releasing a selection of new singles over the next few months. *Samurai Metal* continues in this PMA vein and encompasses a range of different styles. *Oriental Symphony* is almost 10 minutes long and combines gagaku and Chinese instrumentation with shred to astonishing effect, while *Etenraku* is a famous gagaku piece of music. In an inventive culture clash, *Voyage Of The Future* is a Japanese Viking metal song that was written to usher in brighter days – not least for his brother, who temporarily ceased touring with the band due to depression, but happily rejoined for this release.

"Honestly, I wanted to stop music," Ryoji confesses. "But I decided to try, and I wanted a good future for the

"I WATCHED THE NEWS. EVERYONE WAS DYING..."

world's people. So I wrote lyrics about positive things."

Revitalised and determined, Ryoji's ambitions have grown even bigger. Gyze are in talks with Judas Priest's US booking agency, while Ryoji himself plans to write a symphony. Apart from "a unique band like Babymetal", he wonders why so many Japanese musicians are copying Europeans, rather than blazing their own trails. "Heavy metal is just import music, you know? Not origin music. I hope many Japanese bands find a Japanese-only sound."

But whatever happens next, he's set on having fun, and wants nothing more than for you to join him. "Please learn a few Japanese words for our show!" he laughs.

Konnichiwa!

Sayonara!

Itadakimasu!

***ORIENTAL SYMPHONY, SAMURAI METAL* AND *VOYAGE OF THE FUTURE* ARE OUT NOW VIA OUT OF LINE. MORE SINGLES ARE COMING SOON**

NEW NOISE

LA MORTE VIENE DALLO SPAZIO

Journey into the unknown with these cosmic Italian space rockers

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER • PICTURE: MATTEO DEIANA

NAMED AFTER ITALY'S first sci-fi film – UK title *Death Comes From Outer Space* (1958) – Milan-based psychonauts LMVDS deploy their haywire musical time-scoop to stunning effect on their second LP, *Trivial Visions*, churning up lumps of ragged death metal, trancelike krautrock, goth, space rock, prog, doom and horror soundtrack. Although LMVDS's roots as a "jam band open collective" have served them well, *Trivial Visions* represents a concerted effort to refine and direct the band's energies towards a unified whole – a process hastened by organist/singer Melissa Crema joining in 2017. As she explains, LMVDS were formed by guitarists Stefano 'Bazu' Basurto and Angelo Avogadri as "something to relax with, just to play freely on stage. After I joined the band this changed," she laughs, "because I told them, 'I really love this project, why don't you put more effort in and make it grow?' That's when we became a proper band, doing rehearsals every week, and starting to work in a constant way on the songs and to create the identity of the band."

A key strand of that ID is a love of cult Italian cinema, with Dario Argento and Mario Bava the band's go-to filmmakers: "Sometimes we play with these visuals behind us and try to make the music fit the movies!" says Melissa. Assisting in this regard is a slew of vintage analogue equipment: "I play Moog and theremin, and we have some Roland synths from the early 80s," she says. "We listen to a lot of music, and when we find something we like, we try to transpose it into our songs, take inspiration and learn from it. There's a bit from early 90s death metal, a bit of 60s psychedelia, a bit of 70s… We all had different backgrounds, and we tried to put them all together to create something new, to break barriers and do something unique." H

IN SHORT:

SOUNDS LIKE: Occult experiments in sonic time travel

FOR FANS OF: Atheist, Hawkwind, Fabio Frizzi

LISTEN TO: *Ashes*

***TRIVIAL VISIONS* IS OUT NOW ON SVART RECORDS**

SANGUISUGABOGG

Ridiculous band name, ridiculous lyrics – killer twisted death metal

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

WITH A RIDICULOUS name, an unreadable logo and songs with songtitles like *Menstrual Envy* and *Dick Filet*, Sanguisugabogg are clearly not your average, wholesome death metal band. The Ohio quartet's debut album, *Tortured Whole*, confirms it: despite echoes of the old school, this is a new breed of twisted, caveman brutality.

"I wanted our sound to have a lot of feeling and groove, with weird melodies and timings, but I don't really listen to a lot of death metal when I write it," says guitarist Cameron Boggs. "I don't want to rip anything off. When I go into my writing zone I'll just listen to Madonna and Tears For Fears instead."

Signed to Century Media on the strength of their crushing debut demo, *Pornographic Seizures*, Sanguisugabogg have already conquered the internet with a series of hilarious promo videos, including animated marijuana odyssey *Dead As Shit*. Similarly, the band's tricky-to-pronounce name is a combination of 'sanguisuga' – "It's Latin for 'bloodsucker'," says Cameron – and the guitarist's surname, which also has a suitably unpleasant alternate meaning.

"Originally, this *was* a one-man black metal band, so I made it personalised and used my name. But people say 'bog' for 'toilet', so Sanguisugabogg is supposed to be a bloodsucking toilet, sucking blood out of your ass."

When restrictions are finally lifted, Cameron and his bandmates will be first in the queue for extensive touring, armed with some of the fattest, nastiest riffs in recent memory. "We party a lot! I like to think we're the death metal Municipal Waste. We have some nasty, serious lyrics but we're all fun people and we never stop goofing off, smoking weed and being jackasses." H

IN SHORT:

SOUNDS LIKE: Monstrous, swaggering mid-tempo brutality with a twisted streak

FOR FANS OF: Undergang, Obituary, Phrenelith

CHECK OUT: *Gored In The Chest*

***TORTURED WHOLE* IS OUT NOW ON CENTURY MEDIA**

BORSTAL

Ex-Dimmu drummer brings the fury on new hardcore punk project

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURE: GINA GODFREY

IN SHORT:
SOUNDS LIKE:
Brutal, metallic hardcore with a big, punk rock heart

FOR FANS OF:
Agnostic Front, Ironed Out, Hatebreed

CHECK OUT:
Vicious Circles

BEST KNOWN AS a former drummer with Dimmu Borgir, Cradle Of Filth *and* Testament, Nick Barker is simply a British metal legend. Now he's scheming to become a hardcore legend, too (alongside members of Dripback and Knuckledust) in Borstal. Purveyors of ferocious old-school hardcore, with a dash of thuggish street punk thrown in, Nick's new crew represents the fulfilment of a long-held ambition.

"I've always wanted to do something like this, like total Sick Of It All, Cro-Mags worship with a British twist," he says. "I've always been a fan of that music. When we were kids, all the thrash bands we were listening to were wearing GBH and Discharge shirts. That crossover attitude just became part of the fabric of who we are. Punk, metal and hardcore are all connected."

As showcased on debut EP *At Her Majesty's Service*, Borstal's sound owes plenty to classic New York hardcore, but songs like *Vicious Circles* and *Karma* could only have come from rain-bothered British streets. Meanwhile, after a decade working behind the scenes, Nick is excited to be back in action and ready to start some serious homegrown aggro.

"Before, I've always joined other people's bands, but with Borstal I've been a part of it from the start, so it's more personal and it feels like my baby. Everyone in this band is on the same page and we're all fucking chuffed about it. It's a great feeling. It feels great to be doing something new, from the grassroots up." H

***AT HER MAJESTY'S PLEASURE* IS OUT NOW ON 4FAMILY RECORDS**

AD INFINITUM

Opulent symphonic metal that mines a decadent past for inspiration

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS • PICTURE: CLAUDIA CHIODI

IN SHORT:
SOUNDS LIKE:
Historical intrigue meets symphonic opulence

FOR FANS OF:
Nightwish, Beyond The Black, early Within Temptation

LISTEN TO:
Marching On Versailles

"THE PERIODS IN history that make me dream are the mediaeval age or the Renaissance: kings and queens and knights," says Ad Infinitum vocalist and founder Melissa Bonny. "On our first album, there's a breakdown with a waltz vibe and you can imagine people in a ballroom, dancing."

Since forming in 2018, the Swiss symphonic metallers have aimed to take listeners on a journey through time. Their debut album, *Chapter I: Monarchy*, is full of darkly elegant and cinematic arrangements, led by Melissa's glittering vocals and guttural barks. They take lyrical cues from times of danger and grandeur, like The Black Death and the opulent Courts of European kings. "I took inspiration from the life of Louis XIV," says Melissa. "But I do it always in an abstract way; if I'm talking about betrayal, for example, people can relate to it too."

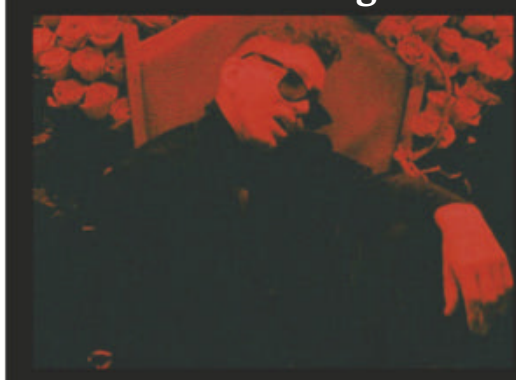
Due to COVID-19, they haven't toured *Monarchy* the way they'd wanted, but they're already back in the studio, recording its follow-up. "It's inspired by a real-life historical character who's both a hero and a tyrant," says Melissa mysteriously. "But it's a secret for now. Maybe later we'll do a reveal!" H

***CHAPTER I: MONARCHY* IS OUT NOW ON NAPALM RECORDS**

DES ROCS: PRESS/NICOLE HERNANDEZ

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to



DES ROCS

"DES ROCS IS from Long Island, New York and he's a rockabilly punk emo. He's got a vibe: it's like future blues, and he's super-unique. Nobody out there sounds like what he's doing right now. It's fresh and different, he rips on guitars and he's a great show-man."

JACOBY SHADDIX
PAPA ROACH

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

AMORPHIS
VINYL COLLECTION 2006-2020

NUCLEAR BLAST/EMP

£209.99

IF EVER A band's back catalogue demanded to be resurrected on lovely, lush-sounding vinyl, it's Finland's masters of folk-fuelled, prog-centric melodeath. Amorphis have been extraordinarily consistent over the years, and this lavish box set is the shiny proof. Comprising everything from vocalist Tomi Joutsen's first album with the band, 2006's *Eclipse*, to early-years retrospective *Magic & Mayhem* and the widescreen melodrama of 2018's acclaimed *Queen Of Time*, this 17-disc extravaganza is available exclusively on grey vinyl via those stand-up folk at EMP. The whole thing weighs a ton and will definitely kill you if it falls on your head from any significant height. But what a way to go!

tinyurl.com/amorphis-boxset

ALOHA FROM HELL SWIMSUIT

£29.99

Summer is coming, and you might even get to experience some of it this time around. Make a splash and remind everyone that even in light, darkness will grow, with this leaf and skull-sporting one-piece from Killstar's new swimwear range.

tinyurl.com/aloha-swim

VAMP T-SHIRT

£30

Graphic art collective Malleus – featuring Ufomammut frontman Urlo – now have their own webstore, with a selection of t-shirts, prints, posters and more. Gaze back from the abyss with this mystically minded garment!

tinyurl.com/vamp-tee

GOJIRA SLIPMAT

£12

Gojira's seventh record, *Fortitude*, extends the French four-piece's voyage into the proverbial dirt – it's a stunning record, best enjoyed on an equally organic medium. So spin the vinyl on this appropriately themed slipmat. Go on.

tinyurl.com/gojira-slipmat

NOCTULE T-SHIRT

£15.99

Svalbard are one of the UK's most exciting bands – it's no surprise that their vocalist and guitarist, Serena Cherry, has an equally exciting side-project. Noctule is *Skyrim*-themed black metal, and it's the bat's knackers. Get on this.

tinyurl.com/noctule-tee

LACUNA COIL GAME

FROM £21

With severe gig withdrawal setting in, *Horns Up!* promises to bring the pit to our kitchen table. Backed by Lacuna Coil, the concert-themed card game is best accompanied by endless beers and *The 119 Show* blasting from your stereo.

tinyurl.com/lacuna-game

TAPE DEALER BOOK

£25

Seven Inches Of Death scribe Dima Andreyuk has turned his attention to 10 years of tape trading with this exhaustive tome. Feast your eyes on some amazing archival imagery, along with commentary from the likes of Death, Asphyx and Demilich.

tinyurl.com/tape-dealer

THE MANDALORIAN MUG

£18

While you might have to wait until 2022 for your next slurp of *Mandalorian* screen-time, sate your thirst with a good old cuppa straight from the mysterious warrior's chrome dome. The lid's removable, too. Nifty.

tinyurl.com/mando-mug

SEPULTURA LONGSLEEVE

£45

Sepultura team up with streetwear brand The Hundreds for a savagely handsome tee referencing a prime cut from last year's *Quadra* LP – the perfect item with which to Fill! The! Void! of your closet.

tinyurl.com/sepul-tee

CORPSEPAINT FACEMASKS

FROM £6.20

Sometimes goat's blood just won't do – these 100% vegan, Finnish facemask packs bring a little bit of self-care to all the Satan and scares. Green tea and rice bran have never felt so hellish.

https://kaamos.co

VREID RAGLAN SHIRT

£17.99

Nine albums in and Norwegian noiseniks Vreid show no signs of slowing. Celebrate their rugged homeland and their ragged riffing with this ultra-handsome raglan shirt. What a scythe for sore eyes you'll be!

tinyurl.com/vreid-raglan

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GOJIRA ARE THE BAND OF THE DECADE...

...but the Duplantier brothers were never made for superstardom. They're metal's quintessential anti-rockstars. And yet, no band has done more to redefine this genre

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • PICTURES: GABRIELLE DUPLANTIER

Joe and Mario Duplantier were working on Gojira's seventh album, *Fortitude*, in the autumn of 2019, when the news hit the headlines: the Amazon was on fire. Not just a small, natural fire, but acres set ablaze by land-grabbing farmers and loggers, killing wildlife and endangering tribes across Brazil and other South American countries.

Most people are so numb to the 24-hour news cycle that they'd see the story and move on. Not the Duplantier brothers.

On that same day, sick to their stomachs, they took to their instruments and played with white-hot rage. The result was recent single *Amazonia*, a groove metal anthem driven by a jaw harp, augmented by throat singing and inspired by the tribal percussive barrage of *Roots*-era Sepultura. *'The greatest miracle is burning to the ground!'* cries Joe.

But it wasn't enough to write a song about the Amazon crisis; they wanted to *do* something about it, too. Frontman Joe made phone call after phone call looking for advice on how to help, and met with indigenous leaders, before the band launched an online auction and released a limited-edition art print to raise money for an NGO, The Articulation Of Indigenous Peoples Of Brazil (APIB).

"It was very, very emotional and intense to talk to these people. I was shaking," remembers Joe, speaking to us via a video call. "It was on *Zoom*. The indigenous people have to use modern tools now to communicate on their situation, and to protect themselves against criminal attacks, gunshots and fires."

It's a story that sets Gojira apart from every other metal band. They took a feeling of powerlessness and not only turned it into brilliant, angry music, but decisive action. It feels like they're striving to figure out the purpose of their lives, and leave the world in a better place than they found it.

Gojira are the first band in years to challenge metal's old guard. Not by using gimmicks, like Slipknot's masks, Sabaton's tanks or Ghost's popes, but simply by being themselves. Their unfiltered hopes and fears about living and dying blast urgently out of the music, empowering you to confront them yourself. Metallica's Kirk Hammett called their last album, 2016's *Magma*, "an incredible piece of art".

They've inspired awe in the next generation, too. Black Peaks frontman Will Gardner has been a fan since hearing 2005's crushing *From Mars To Sirius*: "What really got me into them in the first place was they have a uniquely powerful but deeply emotive sound – their music can be insanely heavy or super-technical, but there's humanity at the core of it."

Now they're about to release *Fortitude* – a stunning album that values the potency of meditative chanting as much as cathartic blastbeats. Like a supporter on the sidelines of a marathon, they urge people to bear up, push past obstacles and realise their potential. Gojira are more than just the band metal needs right now. They're the band the planet needs right now.

Gojira aren't your typical celebrities, and they know it. Joe is first to join today's video call, while younger brother/drummer Mario keeps us waiting. "He's such a rock star," quips Joe, before phoning France's mild-mannered answer to Axl Rose to see where he is.

They will never have stories about sex, drugs and rock'n'roll, but they're interesting precisely because they don't put up a front; they are their authentic selves. Modest but self-possessed, Joe takes the lead and is first to answer questions directed at them both, while Mario shades in the colour of forgotten details.

"WE HAD A FASCINATION FOR BLOODY THINGS AND DEATH"
JOE DUPLANTIER

The pair formed Godzilla in France in 1996, when Joe was 19 and Mario was just 14. Fired up by the gruesome death metal they heard blasting out of the US underground, they wanted to make music that measured up to their heroes' standards. *Brutal Abortion, Rigor Mortis* and *Bleeding* are some of the song titles on Gojira's four early demos.

"We were collectively in that energy, listening to a lot of Morbid Angel and Cannibal Corpse and Death, and we had this absolute fascination for this

The brothers Duplantier, the heart of Gojira

world: music that would talk about bloody things and death, and ghosts and fear. It was almost like trying to understand the rules of a game; we were trying to fit, in that world, for a little bit. But then very quickly, we understood how we could create our own world by breaking these limits," explains Joe. "Mario was taking it super, super-seriously. He had long hair…"

"…Yeah, my dream was just to be in Tampa, Florida," enthuses Mario, "and going to the Morrisound Studio [where Morbid Angel, Cannibal Corpse and Death recorded seminal albums], because all the production that came from that studio was amazing."

Released in 2001, debut album *Terra Incognita* marked that shift into their own world. By this time they had swapped original bassist Alexandre Cornillon for Jean-Michel Labadie, changed their name to Gojira, and were merrily subverting death metal's tropes. Bludgeoning opener *Clone* featured clean singing and warned against interfering with Mother Nature. Instrumentals foregrounded primitive percussion and yelling. There was even a song called *Love*.

"We sort of had an epiphany," says Joe. "And we realised, 'OK, it's OK to call a song *Love*.' It's about love, it's death metal, but it works, actually, because love is freaking *powerful*, and can also be destructive. And so we got rid of all the notions of what is acceptable or unacceptable in our music pretty early on."

Exploring existential themes, each record includes passages, interludes or short songs that complement the onslaught: unexpected sounds in the gaps of their death metal vertebrae. Yet *The Chant*, from new album *Fortitude*, still comes as a surprise. A quasi-dub rock song punctuated by a laid-back vocal refrain, it's further than they've ever gone before.

"*The Chant* expresses our intention that we put behind every song, which is an intention of unifying and compassion, and this chant is clearly a mantra or a prayer addressed to the sky, or addressed to the Unknown, or whatever the universe is," explains Joe. "It's very indigenous, in a way. And we have something indigenous in our music."

Where does that indigenous quality come from?

"I don't know," he admits. "I think we were taught, through example, by our parents, to think outside the box. We had an Azorean, American mom that lived in France who was a yoga teacher, who was speaking differently to all the other moms in the village,

with a different accent. She was very loud and outspoken. Our dad didn't talk much, but he was teaching by example with a lot of hard work."

Mario describes their dad, Dominique Duplantier, as a "typical French artist," who's grumpy, smart, sarcastic and fascinating. Mario's friends were scared of him – and later, so was Joe's wife ("The first time she saw him, she literally ran away. It was so funny!"). They good-naturedly point to his brief, stony-faced appearance halfway through the *To Sirius* video as evidence of why. He's not interested in metal, but nevertheless borrowed money from the bank to fund Gojira's first studio, at home, and even helped with the heavy lifting of construction.

In their secluded old house at the end of a hidden, bumpy road, the Duplantier family, which also included middle sibling Gabby, listened to world music, country music and African percussion. When the brothers began Gojira, there was no local metal scene, so they were on their own, obsessed with the aforementioned death metal bands across the Atlantic and inspired by Sepultura's percussion on *Chaos A.D.* and *Roots*.

Ever curious, ever questioning, Joe still hasn't worked out why they gravitated towards heavy music above all the other genres they'd been exposed to. "The mystery is, why did we get fascinated with metal in the first place?" he wonders. "But I'm not that surprised that we started to incorporate other elements early on."

Before Godzilla or Gojira, there was just Joe and Mario. In Ondres on France's southwest coast, population circa 4,000, most people were into surfing, hunting, trekking and going to the mountains and the beach. The Duplantier brothers, with their multicultural parents, loved the arts and messing about in the forest. They were outsiders. "People used to call us The Addams Family," says Joe.

School was not a happy place for Joe. Bullies would pin him against the wall, chuck wads of wet toilet paper at him, and tease him for having hand-me-down clothes. "I didn't like going to school at all. I found people very cruel. Someone who's your friend one day is not your friend the other day… I guess I was too sensitive," he says dismissively.

Five years younger, Mario found it easier and gelled better with his peers because he played tennis, but he remembers Joe as an introspective teenager who was captivated by thoughts of what lay beyond the village

Christian Andreu: rhythm guitar god

Gojira are guaranteed to melt your face off live

borders. "He was always fascinated by New York, for example, or baseball," he recalls. "So I was more into the local concrete reality, and Joe was already travelling through his mind."

"Yeah, maybe it was something unconscious; maybe I was intrigued by where our mum hailed from," reasons Joe.

Their mum, Patricia Rosa, would tell Joe stories about her own schooldays in The Land Of The Free, where the creative arts were prized. In Joe's school, they only had an hour of music tuition a week and were forced to play the flute. In her school, they were encouraged to try trumpet, cello, violin and guitar. "I was also intrigued by the mood that she was describing, and that she had herself. A very positive outlook on everything, full of energy," he explains. "We were in a small town, too, so somehow I had dreams of change and escape."

Those dreams came true at the age of 13, when Joe flew to the US for the first time, to visit family in Pennsylvania, near the capital of Harrisburg. At the airport, he and his cousin were greeted by his maternal uncle, and the sights they saw through the car windows, of looming skyscrapers and bustling crowds, were a welcome culture shock after the parochial environs of Ondres.

"He picked us up and drove us through New York, Manhattan, and Harlem and Brooklyn. My mind was blown, to see people rapping in the street, and all these different outfits and different skin colours, all these different communities. Fascinating, for a young kid that's been dreaming," Joe enthuses, his voice quickening. "And my dad told me, 'You'll see, you'll go to New York, and you're gonna come back and you're gonna forget about it. It's crazy over there, it's all grey and polluted, and there's too many cars.' And I came back, and I was on *fire*. 'I wanna live there!'"

"PEOPLE CALLED US THE ADDAMS FAMILY"

JOE DUPLANTIER

"When Joe came back after one month, he was another person," says Mario, turning to his brother. "The impact of this travel was huge for your life. You gained confidence, you felt better in your mind and body, I almost didn't recognise you. You looked great!"

Joe's American dream faded into the background as he became more politically aware, but after Gojira formed and gained a following, it began to return. Rather than waiting for a record company there to pick them up, they got themselves on a US tour with Amon Amarth and

GOJIRA LIVE: GETTY. RANDY BLYTHE: PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

"THE BAR HAS JUST BEEN RAISED. AGAIN"

We asked Lamb Of God's Randy Blythe, one of Gojira's earliest champions, to deliver his verdict on *Fortitude*

"*Fortitude*, Gojira's seventh studio offering, succeeds in achieving what very few metal albums do: without sacrificing a single ounce of earth-shattering heaviness (do I really even need to write that? You're reading *Hammer*, so it's a pretty fair guess you already know Gojira are *fucking heavy*), the album moves beyond the often self-imposed constraints of the genre into something entirely else. The palette of heavy metal is used to construct something *more* than metal: a gorgeous, dense, sonic painting of life itself.

"On the southwest coast of France, bordered on one side by the sea and the Pyrenees on the other, sits the tiny village of Ondres. There, down a tree-lined lane cut through a beautiful forest, is an ancient farmhouse filed with art. Behind that is an equally ancient stone barn filled with Gojira's musical equipment.

"One day, 13 years ago, we left the house and barn in the forest and drove high into the Pyrenees to walk the hillsides and wander the Basque villages – the region is one of indescribable beauty. After hours of clearing our heads in the crisp mountain air, the sun began to set and we headed back down towards the coast. Suddenly, Joe skidded over to the side of the treacherous dirt road we drove on, hopped out of our car, ran up to a tree, grabbed a handful of ripe cherries from its branches, and ran back, laughing hysterically. 'We gotta get outta here quick before the farmer who owns that tree shoots us!' he said, and we hauled ass down the mountain and to the sea, stuffing our faces with that delicious fruit the whole way...

"That is what *Fortitude* sounds like – ancient structures holding new art, ocean waves and mountain air, the thrill of illicit fruit as the sun sets at the end of a perfect day. Maybe you can envision that. Maybe not. It doesn't really matter, because the bar that defines this genre has just been raised. Again."

Children Of Bodom in 2006. It was Mario's turn to freak out about the diversity and scale of the cities. "The first day I arrived, I was *truly* amazed. Joe had the first shock when he went at 13, my first shock was at 25 years old!"

It was 2011 when Joe eventually relocated to New York. Mario joined him later, and in 2014 they constructed a new headquarters, Silver Cord Studio. He's still trying to figure out *why* he went ahead and emigrated. All he knows is that it felt right.

"When I finally moved to the States, I felt something was really working for me. A certain energy," he explains. "I'm glad to experience both. The European side, and a French education, and some subtleties, and the idea of the Republic and the Revolution – it's really deep in the French culture. And in America there's the notion of the New World, and things need to be loud, and fun, and big. I know there's a lot of judgement from Europeans for the Americans, sometimes. Because they want everything large. But there's something interesting and *freeing* in this."

Queens, New York. 2015. Gojira are jamming out the first song at Silver Cord. They name it *Silvera* – a ceremonious working title that sticks. Over the ensuing months, they write and record the rest of the album that will become *Magma*, a process that's disrupted by the death of Joe and Mario's mum, Patricia Rosa. Made with sadness and pain, it nevertheless expresses the joy they feel to be her sons. "Somehow her spirit is still around with us," Joe told us.

Magma is released in June 2016, and connects with people like no other Gojira record. "It's a very intimate and personal album, and I think the closer you get to your emotions, and the more honest you are, the closer to people you become," Joe says. "It sounds almost like a paradox, but the more internal you are when you write a song, the deeper it's gonna affect people. *Magma* has something like that."

Later that year, they score a Grammy nomination for Best Rock Album, while *Silvera* is nominated for Best Metal Performance. In 2018, they triumphantly headline Bloodstock festival. To the outside world, *Magma* is a huge step up, but to Gojira it's all part of the career they've been forging for years.

"People see the jump: 'Oh my god, Gojira headlining on *Magma* is huge!', but for us it was a lot of hard work to get there. And unless we screwed up that album big time, we were gonna get there eventually," smiles Joe. "So for us, *Magma* was another good step forward, and there's all these things that unfolded. But it's a combination of all these albums, I think. Maybe I don't realise how much these two songs, *Stranded* and *Silvera*, did also."

"I would say these two songs made a huge difference, because they were maybe more accessible, more well structured, with stronger choruses," adds Mario.

"Yeah, probably. We changed our format a little. It became songs, when before they were epic tracks of metal, with a journey. But *Fortitude* is gonna smash *Magma*, just so you know!"

Joe grins. He knows it's a cliché parroted by metal frontmen, but he means it. Less heart-on-sleeve than *Magma*, but a refined iteration of everything they've been working on for the past 25 years, it's *crushing*. The songs are concise – coming in, melting your face, taking their leave.

Propulsive opener *Born For One Thing* unsettlingly stares death in the face, Joe growling from a primal place. *Hold On* opens with a vulnerable vocal harmony that would be perfectly at home on a Wardruna album, before descending into a sonic maelstrom that matches the *'ocean of stress'* they're urging us to fight. That familiar pick-scraping trick opens *New Found*, a classic Gojira rager designed for bellowing across a headbanging crowd enveloped in dry ice. The towering *Sphinx* and *Into The Storm* are nothing short of epic.

"*FORTITUDE* IS GONNA SMASH *MAGMA*!"
JOE DUPLANTIER

They considered the production more seriously than ever, holding auditions for the perfect drum tech, and bringing in the legendary Andy Wallace on mixing, who not only worked on landmark albums such as Slayer's *Reign In Blood* and System Of A Down's *Toxicity*, but their beloved *Chaos A.D.* and *Roots*. No wonder *Amazonia* sounds so earth-shattering.

It's the song we talk about most today, as it's clearly at the forefront of their minds. Due to political and police corruption, the situation for the indigenous people is desperate and ongoing.

"There's a rate of suicide happening, I've been talking to people that are wearing bulletproof vests, sending their children away because they're scared for their lives. So it's pretty dramatic," says Joe. "We're hoping to communicate on that and really try to help, because our music represents that. It's the strength of the forest; the force you find in nature is influencing us. Volcanos, waves and giant trees. So we almost have a responsibility to honour and protect it."

For Joe Duplantier, Gojira is more than just a band. It's more, even, than a vehicle to get across the urgent messages which underpin their music. "It's a philosophical sort of quest," he says. "Why are we here, what can we do to feel better in our shoes on an everyday basis? And it's about our fears of dying, our fears of living, or breaking the boundaries, or finding one's self. It's therapeutic."

But if Joe needs the band he has spent the last 25 years building, then the world needs them even more right now. If *Fortitude* feels like an important album, that's because it is. It arrives at a tipping point – a moment when the world feels on the brink of toppling into chaos – and provides both a lifeline and a rallying call for their fans; if a band from an obscure French backwater can achieve this much through focus, perseverance and sheer force of will, then you can too.

Gojira embody a sea change in metal too. The old clichés – sex, drugs and the rest of it – are thankfully dying out. The scene is looking outwards as well as inwards, acknowledging the existential crisis every one of us faces as the planet heads towards political, personal and environmental ruin. With *Fortitude*, Gojira have delivered the perfect soundtrack – one that calls on everybody to pull together to get us out of this mess.

"You just ask yourself what you want to be in this life, what you want to achieve," says Mario Duplantier. "Words are great, music is great, but action is something concrete."

The Gojira that made *Fortitude* may feel like a different beast to the Gojira that made *Terra Incognita* or *From Mars To Sirius*, but it's just the wrapper that has changed. Scratch the surface and you can still see the death metal fans beneath. "It's in our DNA," says Joe Duplantier. "Some people like to climb cliffs or fly kites… we like to melt faces." H

FORTITUDE IS OUT APRIL 30 VIA ROADRUNNER. FOR THE LATEST ON GOJIRA'S FUNDRAISING INITIATIVES, GO TO WWW.GOJIRA-MUSIC.COM. FOR MORE ON APIB, SEE HTTPS://APIBOFICIAL.ORG

Jean-Michel Labadie: appropriately, he grew up in the French Bas(s)que Country

NIGHT VISION

Joe and Mario spent three weeks working on two songs that didn't make the cut for *Fortitude*. Joe tells us about one we can expect to hear in the future

WHAT'S THE WORKING TITLE OF THE SONG?
"The Night Shift. It's about all the things that take over when it's night time. So fears, demons and ghosts and nightmares that work together to shake our unconsciousness, you know? And the role that these things play in our lives. They also inspire us a great deal for our death metal music."

WHAT DOES IT SOUND LIKE?
"It was a very subtle riff... it's a bit of an ambitious song, so I feel it has a future. I think it's going to come back. It often works like that – sometimes we have super-interesting riffs, pouring out of us, and we're like, 'Oh my god, this is so cool!' but until we find the right partner to that riff... I remember a conversation with Brent [Hinds] from Mastodon. He was talking about that process of finding interesting chord progressions and he said, 'You know, I find a riff, and then I play for hours to find that riff's best friend', and it's a little bit like that that we're thinking about songwriting."

WHAT'S THE SONGWRITING PROCESS LIKE?
"Sometimes you have one strong idea. Until you find the riff that's going to complement this, and find a balance, then it's doable to make a song. But if you don't find that best friend, or that right combination, it's best to wait. Because sometimes a good riff can be hurt by a not-so-good companion."

THE 50 GREATEST CULT BANDS

“History is written by the winners” goes the old saying, and that’s no less true in metal than it is in the real world. For every Metallica, Black Sabbath, Slipknot or Ghost, there are thousands – no, make that tens of thousands – of fantastic bands who have been cruelly snubbed by fortune.

Well, we’re here to shower a little love on some of those bands. Over the next 16 pages, you’ll find our countdown of the 50 Greatest Cult Bands Ever. By ‘cult’, we mean those bands whose brilliance and influence never gets the respect or attention it deserves beyond a handful of clued-in diehards.

Some of these bands were destined for greatness, only to have it snatched away by bad timing, music industry idiocy or heartbreaking tragedy. Others were so far ahead of their time people just couldn’t get their heads around them (and frequently still can’t). Then there were those who weren’t even aware of their own genius, and blinked out of existence before their influence could even register. And let’s not forget those who have reunited or are still forging their own, unique path.

All life is here, from obscure classic metal warhorses to subterranean noise terrorists, from the unsung founders of entire genres to acts who created a field of their own. The one thing that unites them all is that they deserve to be heard by everybody. It’s time for the forgotten heroes to rewrite history…

WORDS: CHRIS CHANTLER, JOE DALY, MALCOLM DOME, DAVE EVERLEY, PARIS FAWCETT, ELEANOR GOODMAN, CONNIE GORDON SPENCER GRADY, STEPHEN HILL, RICH HOBSON, MATT MILLS, ADAM REES, ALASTAIR RIDDELL, JONATHAN SELZER

50 FALL OF EFRAFA

These enigmas meshed post-metal, post-hardcore and crust during their three-album run. The trilogy retold *Watership Down*'s storyline, using it to voice anti-fascist and vegan ideologies. Despite enjoying underground acclaim, the Brits split after 2009's *Inlé*, claiming they'd said everything they wanted to.
LISTEN TO: ***Last But Not Least*** **(*Owsla*, 2006)**

49 SUPER JUNKY MONKEY

From 1994-1999 four Japanese women took the Day-Glo hued world of angular and balls-out funky rock/metal by storm, becoming darlings of the JNCOs and backwards baseball cap scene via two Sony-issued full-lengths. Their second, 1996's *Parasitic People*, attracted worldwide attention and even a Sick Of It All collaboration before they disbanded following vocalist Mutsumi Fukuhara's suicide.
LISTEN TO: ***A.I.E.T.O.H.*** **(*A.I.E.T.O.H.*, 1995)**

48 3

Formed by guitarist/vocalist Joey Eppard and his brother Josh on drums, these American progressive rockers have long been touring buds with Coheed And Cambria, who nicked Josh for themselves during the early 2000s. Though 3 haven't achieved the same degree of success, they certainly deserve it, their albums crafted with a heartfelt intelligence.
LISTEN TO: ***The End Is Begun*** **(*The End Is Begun*, 2007)**

47 EPHEL DUATH

These avant-garde Italians weren't afraid to follow their artistic urges, branching off into jazz and hardcore while embracing esoteric concepts. Second album *The Painter's Palette* linked songs to colours, while fifth album *Through My Dog's Eyes* whimsically delivered exactly what the title promised – a record told entirely from a pooch's perspective.
LISTEN TO: ***Listen to: Gift*** **(*Through My Dog's Eyes*, 2009)**

46 OXBOW

As if possessing an indescribable discography that falls somewhere between minimalist composer Steve Reich interpreting Neurosis in a 1930s blues joint isn't enough, their legendary shows open up dangerous dimensions. Attendees may find themselves on the wrong end of MMA moves administered by their larger-than-life, but more-than-half-naked frontman, Eugene S. Robinson.
LISTEN TO: ***The Last Good Time*** **(*Serenade In Red*, 1996)**

Super Junky Monkey came to a premature, tragic end

45 WARNING

The Strength to Dream (1999) was a decent slab of Sabbathian doom metal, with its roots firmly in the Vitus camp. The band then did nothing for years, while Pat Walker concentrated on an acting career that took in Pixar films and Terry's Chocolate Orange ads. After seven years off, no one was expecting the gut-wrenching follow-up, *Watching from a Distance*. While the doom world seemed fixated on amps and aping Electric Wizard, it took its cues from the slow-core vibes of Low and Red House Painters; less riff-based and more about a stripped-back despondency. Somehow able to capture the very essence of heartbreak, tracks such as *Bridges* and *Footprints* are a slow-motion unravelling of emotions that have brought the most hardened of doomsters to tears – just ask Pallbearer. For those in the know, *Watching from a Distance* is possibly the finest doom album of the 21st century.
LISTEN TO: ***Faces*** **(*Watching From A Distance*, 2006)**

Warning: you'll need tissues

44 MADE OUT OF BABIES

You might know Julie Christmas from her work on acclaimed Cult Of Luna album *Mariner*, but before that she fronted Brooklyn noise rockers Made Out Of Babies, singing and screaming her lungs out with abrasive authenticity. The band split in 2012, but their three albums still stand as brilliant monuments to catharsis.
LISTEN TO: ***Cooker*** **(*The Ruiner*, 2008)**

43 THE TOILET BÖYS

A bunch of fire-breathing, spark-shooting New York gutter punks fronted by a blonde bombshell drag queen named Miss Guy, Toilet Böys were just too much for nu metal's frat boy contingent to handle. If they'd waited 20 years, they'd have cleaned up on *RuPaul's Drag Race*.
LISTEN TO: ***Another Day In The Life*** **(*Living Like A Millionaire*, 1998)**

42 NASHVILLE PUSSY

Let Them Eat Pussy screamed the title of Nashville Pussy's 1998 debut album, as Amazonian guitarist Ruyter Suys and bassist Corey Parks got head from two hapless sex slaves on the cover. The Atlanta band could have been the new Motörhead, were it not for the fact that the world had a perfectly good Motörhead already. But shitkicking late-90s rock'n'roll doesn't come any finer.
LISTEN TO: ***Go Motherfucker Go*** **(*Let Them Eat Pussy*, 1998)**

PRESS

Dir En Grey: hysteria-inducing J-rock gods

41 DIR EN GREY

Even with their albums only available as imports, Japan's visual kei turned J-rock standard-bearers inspired outright, Beatles-esque hysteria in Sweden and Germany before hitting the UK in 2007. If you weren't tuned into J-Rock culture, seeing their obsessive following in action was like stepping through a looking glass, and they still inspire devotion from hardcore fans.

LISTEN TO: ***Shokubeni* (*Vulgar*, 2003)**

40 GROTUS

This 90s San Francisco outfit weren't a cult band by design, but their mash-up of alt-rock, funk, dub and whatever else they fancied throwing in made for a thrilling whole, yet fell between so many stools that finding a fellow worshipper is as much a revelation as the music itself.

LISTEN TO: ***Up Rose The Mountain* (*Slow Motion Apocalypse*, 1993)**

39 SARCÓFAGO

Arguably more than Sepultura, Sarcófago represent the true, sacrilegious spirit of South American extreme metal. Their 1987 debut album, *I.N.R.I.* – a primitive but potent stew of caged-animal proto-black metal, death and thrash, with its iconic graveside cover – inspired innumerable bands to swear to the dark. A true game-changer.

LISTEN TO: ***Satanic Lust* (*I.N.R.I.*, 1987)**

38 HANDSOME

Like a best-of 1990s NYC hardcore, Handsome saw ex-members of Helmet, Quicksand and Cro-Mags team up alongside legendary producer Terry Date to create an overlooked alt-metal gem. Somehow finding cohesion within conflicting elements, Handsome were equal parts obtuse, dissonant and groove-oriented, all tied together with demanding post-hardcore lyricism and gigantic pop choruses.

LISTEN TO: ***Needles* (*Handsome*, 1997)**

37 DOG FASHION DISCO

Well-versed in the wild, wacky world of Mike Patton, Dog Fashion Disco also threw System Of A Down and Frank Zappa into a blender for their own madcap take on avant-garde metal. The fans *adored* them for it – funding everything from recording new albums and music videos to overseas tours.

LISTEN TO: ***Wait* (*Erotic Massage*, 1997)**

36 THE WORKHORSE MOVEMENT

Released at the dawn of the new millennium, *Sons Of The Pioneers*' bold fusion of metal, funk, rap and blue-collar rock looked set to make Detroit's The Workhorse Movement household names. Fans and critics adored it. Problem was, the band didn't adore each other, and broke up. Shame.

LISTEN TO: ***Keep The Sabbath Dream Alive* (*Sons Of The Pioneers*, 2000)**

35 QUEENADREENA

Formed from the ashes of the briefly massive Daisy Chainsaw, this Brit alt-rock band were fronted by KatieJane Garside, whose childlike voice conveyed astonishing emotional vulnerability and strength, whether she was singing sweetly or screaming in anguish. Onstage, she was similarly unrestrained, a theatrical performer who did the cutesy/strong 'kinderwhore' look before Courtney Love made it popular. A true original.

LISTEN TO: ***Pretty Like Drugs* (*Drink Me*, 2002)**

34 AMEBIX

Born from the original punk movement, Amebix tore their way through the UK toilet circuit in the 80s, leaving crusty fingerprints on everything from black metal to grindcore. Cited as an influence by everybody from Sepultura to Neurosis and Bathory, Amebix are the oft-overlooked missing link between Britain's punk and metal scenes.

LISTEN TO: ***Arise!* (*Arise!*, 1985)**

33 G.I.S.M.

A genuinely threatening entity in the punk rock secne, G.I.S.M.'s notorious reputation stems from attacks on audiences, use of flame-throwers, and uncompromising, metal-laced mayhem. Their first show in 14 years and first outside of their native Japan, at 2016's Roadburn festival, brought in fanatics from across the world.

LISTEN TO: ***A.B.C. Weapons* (*Detestation*, 1984)**

PRESS

32 IMPOTENT SEA SNAKES

Among the most eccentric cult bands of the 20th century, few rivalled the jaw-dropping depravity of the Impotent Sea Snakes. Formed in the mid 80s by Dean Riopelle (stage name '13'), the Sea Snakes were a 10-person (and often many more) troupe of crossdressing musicians and performers who transformed every stage into an orgiastic freakshow of sex-charged, rock'n'roll debauchery.

Highly energetic and wantonly provocative, their music united a broad spectrum of subcultures such as punk, metal, BDSM, goth, gay and other alternative lifestyles with a propulsive rock sound and an eye-popping live show. Patrick Briggs, aka 'Torment XXX', was co-lead vocalist in the band. He explains that their mission was simple: "Shock and awe, basically. At every fucking gig on the planet."

'Shock and awe' actually undersells what went down at a Sea Snakes gig. As the band uncorked a siege of riff-powered bangers, performers – some on stilts, some carrying snakes – would prowl about, piercing their breasts and genitalia with needles and graphically simulating sex acts on each other, often naked or covered up to the bare minimum required by local law. They burned bibles and US flags, and go-go dancers occasionally used crosses for decidedly unholy purposes.

Many clubs flat-out banned them. The normally progressive city of Los Angeles reportedly threatened to close down two clubs that had booked the ISS, forcing the band to caravan over to nearby Silverlake to play their show. A Georgia club had its alcohol licence revoked after a Sea Snakes show during which bandmembers allegedly exposed themselves. Invariably, they attracted police, religious zealots and protesters hell-bent on stopping the shows, and it was not uncommon for the band to be attacked or threatened. Patrick recalls, "I had a death threat in Florida. Granted, I can get on your nerves, but not to that extent! Ha ha! Nothing you can do about it; you're supposed to turn it into the FBI and then they know who killed you when you die."

Musically, the Sea Snakes released three studio albums hewing mainly to punk, rock and metal. But they would never receive any mainstream radio play or MTV exposure, not with tracks like *Pope John Paul Can Suck My Dick*. *Impotent Sea Snakes Live In Wacken Germany* (2005) is their only official DVD, capturing their magnificent set at Wacken, and they also gained notoriety after appearing on a segment of HBO's *Real Sex* TV series.

The point was never to simply shock. The Impotent Sea Snakes brought a genuine sense of theatre and panache to every performance. "It's like Vaudeville schtick. That's what it is," says Patrick. Their fans included Lemmy and the wrestler Goldberg, both of whom appear in their *Pink Lipstick* video, and guitarist Robin Finck played in the ISS prior to joining Nine Inch Nails in 1994.

With their cult status comes a shroud of tragedy. Seven bandmembers have died from causes including suicide and AIDS-related illness. Dean Riopelle passed away from a heroin overdose in 2013. Authorities later brought murder charges against a woman known as the 'Call Girl Killer', alleging that she intentionally gave him a fatal shot; she denied any connection to his death.

Excluding a one-off show in 2009, the band have been inactive since 2004, and a reunion seems unlikely ("I don't see that happening," says Patrick). But those fortunate enough to have seen them live aren't likely to forget the experience. With virtually zero mainstream exposure and in the face of unrelenting external pressures, the Impotent Sea Snakes spent more than 20 years blowing minds and melting faces. There will never be another.

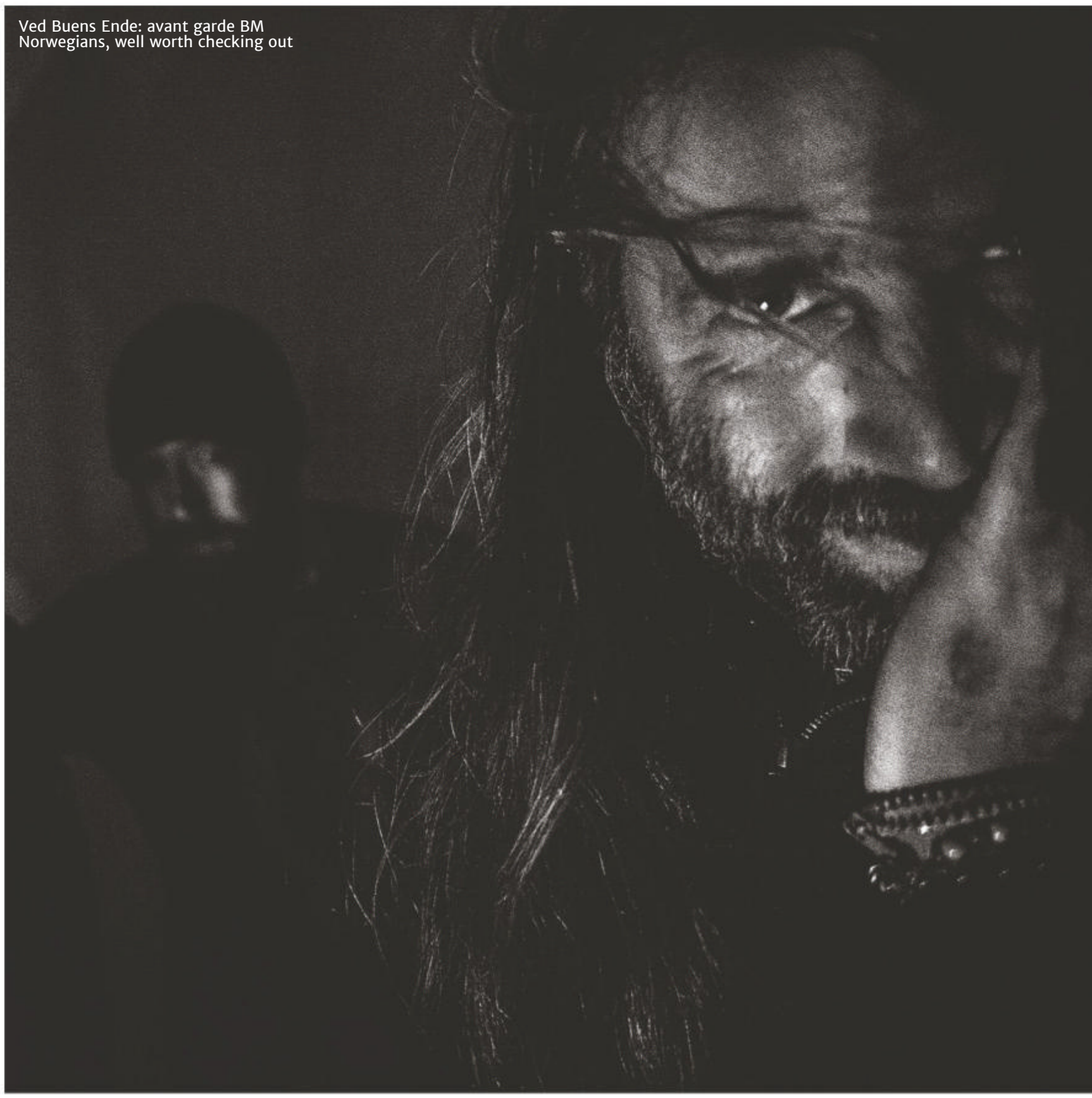
LISTEN TO: ***Kangaroos (Up The Butt)*** **(*God Save The Queens*, 1995)**

Impotent Sea Snakes: gloriously provocative

"I HAD A DEATH THREAT IN FLORIDA"

PATRICK BRIGGS

GTCRFOTO / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO


Ved Buens Ende: avant garde BM Norwegians, well worth checking out

31 COP SHOOT COP

Although integral to the early/mid-90s underground, Cop Shoot Cop's stature has become dissipated somewhat, only because no particular scene could properly lay claim to them. Although they had roots in the nihilism of their native NYC's no wave movement, their taut, claustrophobic urban paranoia made them natural allies of more metallic hometown contemporaries Unsane, Prong and Helmet. Wracked by a self-awareness and sense of ultimate futility, the band's industrial-laced, politically-charged invective also found kindred spirits in the likes of Grotus and Marxist rappers Consolidated. Seething with antagonistic intent, Cop Shoot Cop sounded like they were forging something startling from the wreckage of the modern world, given added sonic frisson by forgoing a guitar in favour of two basses. Their acerbic noise rock made a clear impact on Therapy?, who took them on tour in '93.

LISTEN TO: ***Coldest Day Of The Year*** **(*White Noise*, 1991)**

30 VED BUENS ENDE

Although one of the lesser-known bands in the black metal canon, largely on the basis of having only one album to their name, Ved Buens Ende weren't just instrumental in the scene's shift into more avant-garde realms, but a seminal act whose reverberations are still felt today. A roving, Kurt Weill-esque lurch awash in spindly riffs and portentous, intoxicated vocals, 1995's *Written In Waters* cast a hallucinatory spell throughout Norway and beyond. Akercocke, Voices and <code> incorporated the off-kilter narrative approach, while more blackened tracks such as *Den Saakaldte* sound like a blueprint for cosmonauts such as Blut Aus Nord.

LISTEN TO: ***You, That May Wither*** **(*Written In Waters*, 1995)**

29 TREPONEM PAL

When these Parisians' self-titled debut appeared in 1989, people focused more on their overt lyrical sexuality as opposed to their dystopian sound. Having a track entitled *Soft Mouth Vagina* will do that, though. With influences such as Foetus and Godflesh, they took industrial metal to pulsating, erotic territory. Their first three albums are small-c classics with fans, critics and peers (guitarists Michel Bassin and Laurent B joined Ministry for Lollapalooza '92) and, led by sole original member, vocalist Marco Neves, they've continued their contemptuous spell with explorations of reggae, dub, techno and disco and stunts such as a revved-up cover of *Funky Town*.

LISTEN TO: ***The Black Box*** **(*Treponem Pal*, 1989)**

28 DISCORDANCE AXIS

This New Jersey trio formed in 1992, taking a grindcore base and adding elements of classical, blues, jazz and 70s prog to create something progressive, while Jon Chang's lyrics were mostly inspired by animé. They were essentially a studio project and only toured in the US and Japan, which was where most of their fanbase were – and even there, records sales figures were only in the hundreds. Their final album, 2000's *The Inalienable Dreamless*, would become a grindcore classic, but they split the following year. Drummer Dave Witte would go on to join thrash revivalists Municipal Waste.

LISTEN TO: ***The End Of Rebirth*** **(*The Inalienable Dreamless*, 2000)**

27 SATAN

The history of the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal is littered with bands that squandered or didn't live up to their potential, but none of them had quite as much of the stuff as Newcastle's Satan. Although they were more progressively minded than their peers, and had one of the scene's greatest vocalists, Brian Ross, at the helm for their debut LP, 1983's *Court In The Act*. His temporary departure and the various name changes over the years stalled their momentum, despite getting props from Metallica. Since reuniting in 2011, Satan have become revered once more by lovers of classic metal.

LISTEN TO: ***No Turning Back*** **(*Court In The Act*, 1983)**

PRESS/KIM SØLVE TRINE + KIM DESIGN STUDIO

26 MANILLA ROAD

The epitome of the true cult metal band, Kansas warriors Manilla Road remained in freakishly niche obscurity for decades, their epic sorcery proving too lurid and arcane for mainstream tastes, even in the 80s. After a string of killer records through the 80s – each steeped in mythological storytelling, their barbarian brawn tempered with a cerebral elegance – the band all but sat out the 90s altogether, as their legacy grew among crate-diggers and connoisseurs.

Regrouping in 2001 with a batshit concept LP about war in Atlantis between Thor, Odin, Poseidon and Cthulhu, the band were able to reap some long-overdue glory, releasing another eight albums and playing to audiences as devoted and euphoric as any Manowarrior. Founding guitarist/vocalist and bona fide metal legend Mark 'The Shark' Shelton died after a headline show at Germany's Headbangers Open Air in 2018, bringing a 40-year career to a premature end, but on a glorious high.

LISTEN TO: ***Necropolis*** **(*Crystal Logic*, 1983)**

Manilla Road: magnificent myth masters

Fudge Tunnel: noisy, vitriolic and dark – what's not to love?!

25 FUDGE TUNNEL

There was something discordant yet controlled about Fudge Tunnel, which marked them out as unusual in the early 1990s. The Nottingham trio combined metal with an experimental excitement, and nothing sums up their appeal better than their 1991 debut album, *Hate Songs In E Minor*. In many ways, it mirrored what Melvins and Swans were doing in the States, but with a twist; they were noisy, vitriolic and dark, with an eccentric sense of humour. Fudge Tunnel released three albums before splitting up in 1994, and only vocalist/guitarist Alex Newport has gone on to achieve success in the music industry. As a producer, he's recorded bands such as At The Drive-In and The Mars Volta – not surprising, considering they both have a Fudge Tunnel influence running through their veins. The band might be long gone, but the Fudge spirit still runs deep.

LISTEN TO: ***Spanish Fly*** **(*Hate Songs In E Minor*, 1991)**

24 HUM

Although the 1990s took many endearing, music-loving nerds and turned them into megastars, Hum weren't ever interested in embracing the mainstream. Too esoteric for lovers of grunge, too heavy to be considered pure shoegaze and too self-effacing for radio and TV outlets, the eclectic Illinois four-piece never quite settled into a scene, yet their genius didn't go unnoticed. Distinctively thoughtful and musically ambitious, Hum became one of the most influential bands of the decade following their 1995 album *You'd Prefer An Astronaut*, which birthed their one chart hit, *Stars*. Here they explored sparkling planetary adventures and floating atmospherics, channelling shoegaze-inspired sounds through thundering guitar tones, and boldly throwing in introspective, romantic lyrics to enhance the dreaminess of the record. Today, their influence can be seen in the likes of Deftones, Cave In, Nothing and Teenage Wrist, with many alt-rock outfits attempting to embody Hum's hulking, distorted chords and lush musical expanses.

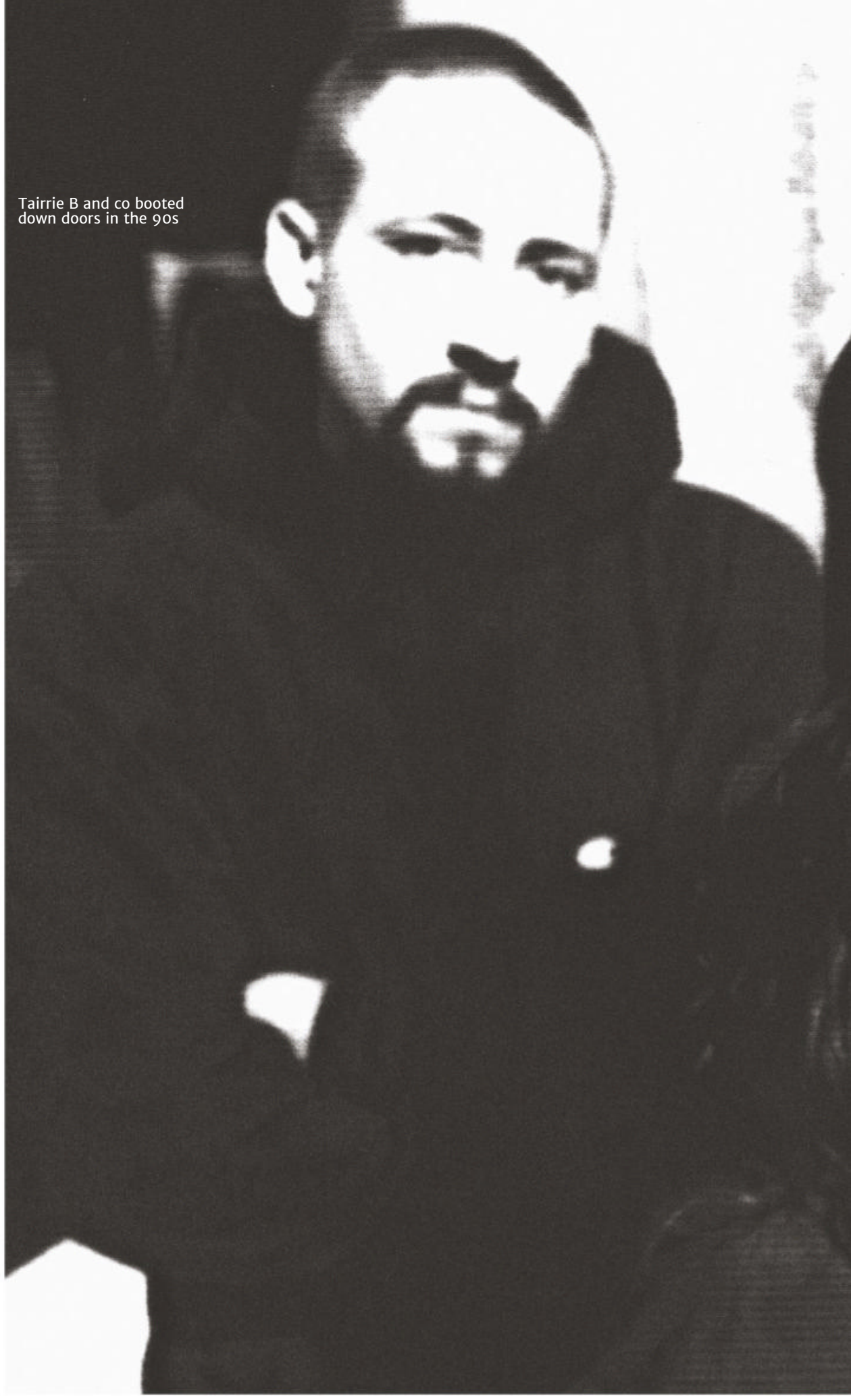
LISTEN TO: ***Stars*** **(*You'd Prefer An Astronaut*, 1995)**

Hum: shoegazers seeing stars

SHUTTERSTOCK. PRESS

23

MANHOLE / TURA SATANA



Tairrie B and co booted down doors in the 90s

The fireball collision of rock and hip hop that took place at the start of the 90s seeded a new strain of aggressive music – one that drew on the best of both worlds. Yet most rap-metal bands were just rock kids with an Ice Cube record and a surfeit of testosterone.

Tairrie B was different. She made her name as a rapper with her 1990 debut album, *Power Of A Woman*, but within a few years, she'd reinvented herself as the singer with rap-metal agitators Manhole, spitting out feminist anthems and redefining perceptions of what it meant to be a woman in a metal band.

Unlike many of her peers, Tairrie wasn't some suburban knuckledragger. When she rapped, it was real. Her subject matter was authentic and radical in the mid-90s metal scene: violence against women, rape, racial tension, pro-choice issues, police brutality, abusive relationships.

"Manhole were an anomaly," she says today. "I can't name another band with a woman doing what we were doing at the time."

Tairrie was already a pioneer in the hip hop world by the time she formed Manhole. She was the first female rapper to put out a full-length album (the aforementioned *Power Of A Woman* was released via N.W.A. linchpin Eazy-E's Ruthless Records). But witnessing an incendiary Body Count live show sparked something in her. "Seeing Ice-T, who was a hardcore gangster rapper, rock with a heavy band backing him really spoke to me. Loudly," she says.

When she told her manager and label that she wanted to form a rap-rock band, they shut her down. She responded by refusing to finish the album she was working on, firing her manager and eventually extricating herself from her contract with Eazy-E.

This iron-willed determination to do things her way was embedded deep in Manhole's DNA. Early on, Tairrie organised Rock For Choice gigs and benefits to raise awareness of violence against women. When potential record labels asked her to tone down her lyrical content and take-no-prisoners stage persona, she refused.

"I was not Gwen Stefani and our songs were not radio-friendly in the usual way," she says. "My guys were from Venice [Beach, gang-heavy LA neighbourhood], they were tough. I was kinda scary. We had no desire to be another Hollywood band playing watered down pop-rock songs or a freakshow like Coal Chamber, for fuck's sake. That was not us."

German label Noise Records signed Manhole and put them in the studio with Korn producer Ross Robinson to record their debut album, 1996's *All Is Not Well*. For once Robinson fluffed his task, though a flat production job couldn't hide the power of Manhole's music – and certainly not the impact of Tairrie's message on tracks such as the anti-rape broadside *Victim*, and *Cycle Of Violence*, inspired by the singer's own experiences of an abusive relationship. They were uncomfortable subjects, but that was the point. "I was outspoken about many hard truths in unflinching detail because I felt these were serious subjects that needed to be addressed."

All Is Not Well chimed with the emerging nu metal movement, and the UK and Europe embraced them. But they were blindsided the following year when a lesser-known punk band also called Manhole threatened to sue unless they either bought the name from them or changed it. Unable to buy the name, the singer rebranded her band.

"I WAS NOT GWEN STEFANI"
TAIRRIE B

PRESS/ED COLVER

At least she picked a cool name: Tura Satana, after the star of Russ Meyer's cult movie *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*. "It was empowering to see this aggressive woman, kicking ass and taking no shit from the men around her," says Tairrie. "She was my spirit animal and a badass babe."

The band released one album as Tura Satana, 1997's *Relief Through Release*, which dialled back the rap-rock in favour of a more metallic yet textured approach. It was a tremendous record, yet they struggled to make the jump to the next level commercially. "The label had constant distribution problems," says Tairrie. "When a band is on high-profile tours, playing festivals and doing tons of press to promote their album but it can't be found in the stores, that's not the fault of the artist."

By 1998, label problems plus personal issues within the fold had become insurmountable and Tairrie decided to end the band. "I was angry, but part of me was gutted because I had been working so hard to make things happen for us. It was very painful to walk away from it, but also a relief."

Tairrie's post-Tura Satana career saw her put together My Ruin, where she was soon joined by guitarist, songwriting partner and future husband Mick Murphy. My Ruin released eight albums before the pair put it on standby mode in 2011. She's not been idle since then, putting out two hip hop albums, 2015's *Vintage Curses* and 2020's *Feminenergy*, and working on a book.

Frustratingly, history has sidelined Tairrie and her bands to make way for the juggernaut that was nu metal, and bands such as Korn and Limp Bizkit. "I could give a fuck about bands like Limp Bizkit," she says. "I've never viewed Fred Durst as my contemporary. Manhole and Tura Satana both got lumped into the whole 'nu metal' thing. We were our own unique entity."

Even beyond genre definitions, Tairrie deserves wider attention and respect for the ground she broke in the 90s. "I think I can confidently say that I kicked down a few doors for women in rock to walk through, just like the women did who came before me," she says. "Empowered women empower women and we can be whatever we want to be."

LISTEN TO: *Eternalux* (*Relief Through Release*, 1997)

22 DEATH SS

One glance at a Death SS promo shot confirms how committed these Italian eccentrics were to pushing horror aesthetics in metal further, harder and more obsessively than any band before or since. Formed in 1977, led by Steve Sylvester's possessed rasp and the orgiastic guitar of Paul Chain, the mysterious bandmates presented themselves as Death, The Vampire, The Zombie, The Mummy and The Werewolf, pushing metal's occult flirtation to the extreme with their own weird, creepy style on 80s underground classics like *Horned God Of The Witches* and *Evil Metal*; no wonder Tobias Forge keenly professes their influence on Ghost.

LISTEN TO: ***Heavy Demons*** **(*Heavy Demons*, 1991)**

21 NECROPHAGIST

With just two stunning albums (*Onset Of Putrefaction* in 1999 and *Epitaph* in 2004), Germany's Necrophagist helped lay down the blueprint for death metal in the 21st century. Technically dazzling, fiendishly inventive and heroically heavy, the band's aptly titled second and final effort had the underground salivating and gave countless bands plenty of ideas to plunder for years to come. Given no official statement of their demise has ever emerged since they last played in 2010, fans have feverishly speculated that a third album might be in the works or even finished. Sadly, the reclusiveness of perfectionist mastermind Muhammed Suiçmez has merely added an air of mystery and meant that any reappearance remains a rumour.

LISTEN TO: ***Stabwound*** **(*Epitaph*, 2004)**

20 CONFESSOR

Formed in 1986, this doomy crew from North Carolina split opinion like blue cheese and Brussels sprouts. Fronted by vocalist Scott Jeffreys, whose despairing, ear-piercing caterwauls rivalled the *Die Hard* franchise for potential glass breakages, Confessor's complex, stop-start creations baffled a multitude of less resilient listeners, as drummer Steve Shelton's fondness for fitful rhythmical jerks over steady beats reinforced an alienating rep. The band collapsed under the weight of their own musical ambition after releasing their heavy-ass debut album, *Condemned*, in 1991, only getting back together after the death of guitarist Ivan Colon in 2002. Scott now broadcasts on serener frequencies, but metal continues to play catch-up to Confessor's still-curiously delirious art.

LISTEN TO: ***Collapse Into Despair*** **(*Condemned*, 1991)**

19 PAINKILLER

Featuring the exploratory talents of John Zorn, Bill Laswell and Mick Harris, Painkiller ran John's thrash-jazz ensemble Naked City towards darker and noisier territories. Their debut album, *Guts Of A Virgin*, and follow-up EP, *Buried Secrets*, combined John's harsh sax bleating, Mick's final associations with the grindcore and death metal beats he pioneered in Napalm Death, and Bill holding it together with a fat bass that somehow managed to veer into dub slinkiness. No sensibilities were spared as UK authorities found themselves rankled by *Guts...*' original 'obscene' cover art, while fans found themselves overwhelmed by violent noise and the projection of violent imagery during their live shows.

LISTEN TO: ***Scud Attack*** **(*Guts Of A Virgin*, 1991)**

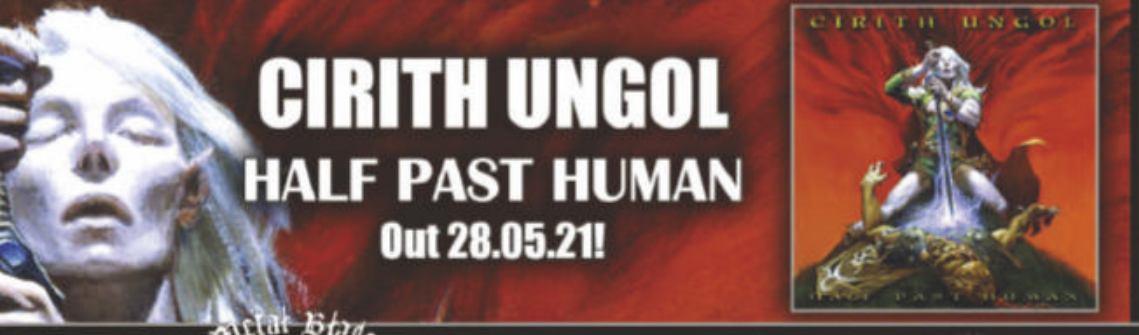
18 GOD

Almost everything about this British avant-noise troupe was blasphemous. The first and obvious strike was their moniker. Next, the bastardisation and inflation of the parameters of 'musical ensemble', then the thematic exploration of the already-scarred underbelly of addiction, sexuality, religion and various combinations thereof. Band leader Kevin Martin, who has since found fame as The Bug, curated a ribald and palpitating factory-floor groove with the help of a lineup that often included two drummers, two bass players, three guitars, a wall of saxophones, woodwinds, samplers and whatever else was lying around. The result was some of the heaviest industrial metal/rock ever to displace organs. In *Possession* and *The Anatomy Of Addiction*, Martin and friends – a rotating cast that included Mark E. Smith (The Fall), Justin Broadrick (Godflesh), John Zorn, experimental horn blower Tim Hodgkinson, Alex Buess (16-17), Niko Wenner (Oxbow) and more – gifted two impeccable and thunderous full-lengths rooted in outsider art improv jams and chest-caving potency.

LISTEN TO: ***On All Fours*** **(*The Anatomy Of Addiction*, 1994)**

Death SS: striking!

PRESS



Metal Blade
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The Orchard

17 YAKUZA

It's only in our topsy-turvy world that the real Yakuza – a ritualistic organised crime syndicate – has a higher profile than these wizards from Chicago, a jazz and world music-inspired/avant-garde/doom/thrash outfit who originally trod the boards from 1999 to the mid-2010s. Better known in underground music nerd circles as the band that introduced saxophonist/vocalist/guitarist Bruce Lamont (Bloodiest, Brain Tentacles) to the world, Yakuza always seemed destined for bigger things, but never failed to disrupt their own progress by deliberately becoming more and more musically impenetrable with each release. Their works, especially 2002's *Way Of The Dead* and 2006's *Samsara*, were embraced by outlets as diverse as *Terrorizer, Rolling Stone* and the Chicago *Sun-Times* as they crushed the boundaries of metal, soared over the heads of the fanbase of tour mates Opeth, Lacuna Coil and The Dillinger Escape Plan, and proved they were way ahead of their time.

LISTEN TO: *Miami Device* (*Way Of The Dead*, 2002)

16 PAGAN ALTAR

While their Black Sabbath-obsessed brethren Angel Witch and Witchfinder General released some of NWOBMH's finest LPs, south London's Pagan Altar only initially managed a self-released tape in 1982. However, their ominous, occult-steeped Hammer horror metal, centred around the father and son duo of Terry and Alan Jones, slowly (it is doom after all) spread with tape trading and helped shape the nascent doom metal scene throughout the late 80s and early 90s. Inspiring a small but fanatical fanbase (known as Templars), they then reunited in the 00s, with help from Solstice guitarist Rich Walker. With the original tape finally seeing a proper release, along with further new slabs of killer, 70s-flavoured doom, plus festival appearances across Europe and North America, Pagan Altar were finally starting to get their due when Terry Jones sadly passed away in 2015. Alan keeps the spirit alive with occasional appearances with Brendan Radigan (Magic Circle/The Rival Mob) doing Jones Senior's legacy proud.

LISTEN TO: *Judgement Of the Dead* (*Judgement of The Dead*, 1982)

15 THE YOUNG GODS

If Geneva's The Young Gods aren't more widely renowned, it's only because their techno-primitive vision was so revolutionary, no one but them knew how to follow it through. Appearing like an cataclysmic fissure amidst the rock landscape, their self-titled debut album still sounds as startling and futuristic as it did 34 years ago, turning sampled metal riffs and classical music into a series of matter-meets-antimatter detonations. This was music to move mountains, at the command of frontman Franz Treichler, whose rich, elemental invocations sounded like the Doors' Jim Morrison turned wild priest. Ecstatic, restless and still shamanic, TYG have never stopped evolving. From the vast, unstable terrain conjured up by 1989's *L'Eau Rouge*, through the rock-pulverising thrill rides of *T.V. Sky* and *Only Heaven*, to the by turns exhilarating and sensual electronica of their later albums, they remain a Promethean, life-changing entity, regularly name-checked and held in awe by metal and industrial artists alike.

LISTEN TO: *Envoyé!* (*The Young Gods*, 1987)

The futuristic Young Gods:

Lääz Rockit: local legends

THE YOUNG GODS: PRESS/JOHAN JACOBS

BERTRAND ALARY / AVALON

14 LÄÄZ ROCKIT

In 2011, to celebrate their 30th anniversary as a band, Metallica hosted a four-night concert event in their hometown of San Francisco, with each night featuring different surprise openers. On the third evening, fans lost their collective shit when the openers turned out to be none other than Lääz Rockit. The Bay Area five-piece formed in 1982 and their late-80s releases saw them make a compelling case for the much-debated fifth spot after the Big 4 of thrash. They played with Metallica, Motörhead, Megadeth, Anthrax, Exodus and even Slayer, who opened up for Lääz Rockit in 1984. But inconsistent output and a 1992 breakup would conspire to forever relegate the band to 'local legend' status. Still, 1989's *Annihilation Principle* stands as one of the greatest thrash albums of all time, and a highly successful 2005 reunion established that there remained much love in the world for Lääz Rockit.

LISTEN TO: ***Fire In The Hole* (*Annihilation Principle*, 1988)**

13 THE BLOOD BROTHERS

As the emo and post-hardcore boom of the mid-00s began to take over alternative culture, fans of the inventive, manic early version of the genre felt disenfranchised by the new corporate variant they were being spoon-fed. For many, Washington quintet The Blood Brothers provided some much-needed balance. With their third album, 2003's *...Burn, Piano Island, Burn*, they gained a significantly larger platform thanks to production from nu metal overlord Ross Robinson. Not everyone got it, but for those who delighted in the unique and acquired taste of dual frontmen Johnny Whitney and Jordan Billie trading screaming chipmunk yelps over scratchy, Fugazi-style guitars, noise-rock freakouts and lyrics that read like serial killer beat poetry, The Blood Brothers became an obsession. The band reached their commercial and creative peak in 2006 with fifth album *Young Machetes*, before splitting up a year later to little fanfare from the mainstream, but sorrow from a devastated hardcore fanbase. Their influence can still be heard in the boundary-less melting pot of The Armed, or the scattergun blasts of Seeyouspacecowboy.

LISTEN TO: ***Ambulance vs. Ambulance* (*...Burn, Piano Island, Burn*, 2003)**

12 REVEREND BIZARRE

In choosing to worship in the church of traditional doom, all signs pointed to Reverend Bizarre living a life of pious toil at the altar of the riff. But call it divine intervention or a deal with the devil: the band didn't just succeed at championing doom metal in all of its occult-flavoured glory – they *excelled* at it. Chart success in their native Finland on *Crush The Insects* and swansong *III: So Long Suckers* was undoubtedly impressive, but even more amazing was the band's ability to turn a 16-minute dirge (*Teutonic Witch*) into a chart-topping single. Less successful outside their home country, the band nonetheless earned reverence from those lucky few who bore witness to their enthralling combination of traditionalism and theatricality. Displaced from time, Reverend Bizarre came too late for the 90s doom-boom, but too early to enjoy the fruits of the 2010s occult rock revival. Even so, Reverend Bizarre skulked so Ghost could loom.

LISTEN TO: ***Teutonic Witch* (*III: So Long Suckers*, 2007)**

11 WARRIOR SOUL

Warrior Soul are the greatest band no one ever gave a fuck about despite having every single thing going for them: an arsenal of killer early 90s alt-metal anthems, the muscle of Metallica's management behind them and a fireball of charisma for a frontman. Kory Clarke was a new kind of metal idol: literate, furious, sarcastic and surreal, like William Burroughs in a second-hand biker jacket. He wrote songs that eviscerated America (*Ghetto Nation*), celebrated party drugs (*Trippin' On Ecstasy*) and excoriated Donald Trump decades before everyone else (*The Wasteland*). Seriously, stick a pin in the tracklisting of any of the first four Warrior Soul albums and you're guaranteed a stone cold classic. But a loudmouth punk shitting on his own doorstep wasn't going to win any friends, and America threw the perfect shade by completely ignoring him. Kory Clarke took the hint and eventually retooled Warrior Soul as an apocalyptic biker bar party band. Nobody gave a fuck about them then either.

LISTEN TO: ***The Wasteland* (*Drugs, God And The New Republic*, 1991)**

10 O.L.D.

Starting out as Old Lady Drivers – a primitive grindcore parody with alarmingly obsessive geriatric fixations – these New Jersey weirdos momentarily hooked up with former Nirvana/Soundgarden guitarist Jason Everman before going fully gonzo under the O.L.D. moniker. Principally the brainchild of James Plotkin (guitars, programming) and Alan Dubin (vocals), the project lingered on the Earache label like a cankerous sore, pumping out occasional bouts of brain-frying industrial spew (try to imagine a kaleidoscopic Godflesh buzzing on a sugar rush). Albums such as *Lo Flux Tube* (1991) and *The Musical Dimensions Of Sleastak* (1993) – the latter boasting the marvellously-titled *Backwards Through The Greedo Compressor* – heralded inspired descents into more perplexing experiments, before O.L.D.'s career-high kiss-off, 1995's *Formula*, finally drew a line under the spiralling madness. A bewildering dose of alien electro-pop drizzled with vocoder-processed entreaties, this last hoorah was the fittingly freaky full-stop to a flagrantly confusing existence.

LISTEN TO: Freak Now (*The Musical Dimensions Of Sleastak*, 1993)

9 VIDEODRONE

Videodrone were the band Korn could have been. They grew up alongside each other in Bakersfield, California, and Videodrone singer Ty Elam had been involved with Jonathan Davis' pre-Korn outfit, SexArt. The big difference is that Korn founded a genre and sold millions of records and Videodrone… well, who the hell knows who they are these days? They had already released a bunch of gothy, industrial-tinged albums as Cradle Of Thorns by the time they signed to Korn's Elementree label. With a change of name came a change in sound: a glitchy, synth-pop influenced take on nu metal, as embodied by the terrific single *Ty Jonathan Down*, which featured a guest appearance from JD and crackled with homoerotic tension. Videodrone put out an album, the public refused to bite, and they disappeared back into the Bakersfield shadows. Today, their biggest gift to the world is Jonathan Davis's jerky-marionette dancing, which he copped from Ty Elam early on. Guess that's better than nothing.

LISTEN TO: *Ty Jonathan Down* (*Videodrone*, 1999)

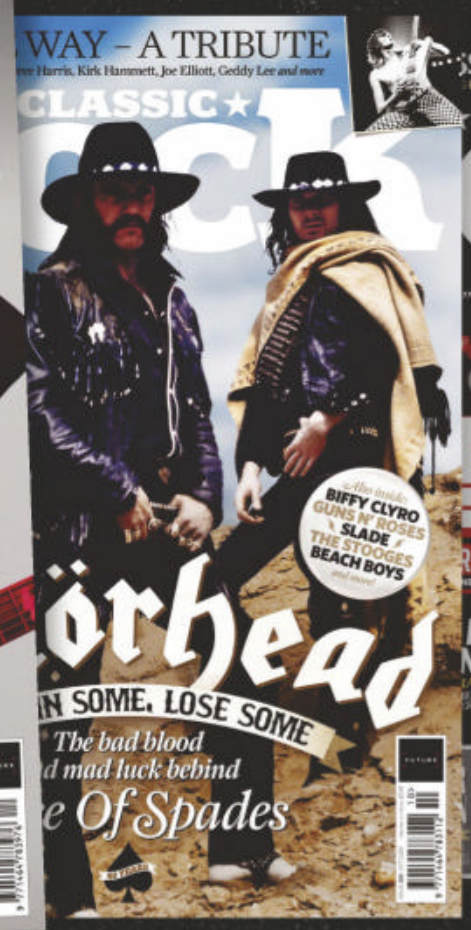
Human Waste Project: one of the greatest bands of the 90s, no question

8 HUMAN WASTE PROJECT

Nu metal didn't happen all at once. Even before its commercial peak at the turn of the millennium, dozens of long-forgotten bands had already come and gone. Some were great, some were awful, and all of them have been lost down the back of the sofa of history. Los Angeles' Human Waste Project were one of the great ones. They received the nu metal papal blessing courtesy of Ross Robinson, who produced their sole album, 1997's *E-Lux*, but real star of the show was electrifying singer Aimee Echo, whose distinctive voice wrapped itself around a sound that owed as much to the shapeshifting art-rock of Jane's Addiction as it did Faith No More and Rage Against The Machine's gonad-swinging thwunk. Human Waste Project blipped out of existence in 1998, just before the nu metal gravy train left the station. They're more than just a great lost band – they were proof there was more to that scene than bros in baggy pants and wallet chains. These days Aimee Echo is busy teaching yoga in Los Angeles. Healthy living's gain is definitely rock'n'roll's loss.

LISTEN TO: *Dog* (*E-lux*, 1997)

PRESS



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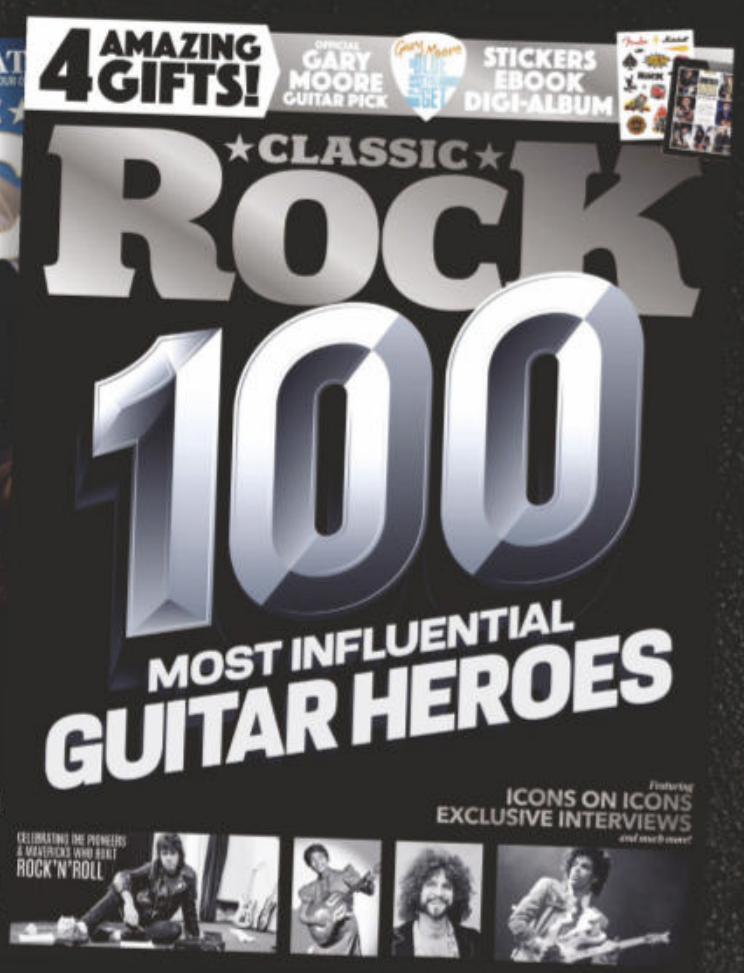

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Deadsy: hit a deadsy end

7 DEADSY

Hollywood synth-goth brats Deadsy had it all: a Type O Negative-gone-synth-pop sound, a celebrity parent (frontman Elijah Blue Allman's mom is Cher) and nu metal royalty Jonathan Davis and Fred Durst in their corner. Except Deadsy were thwarted at every step. They made an epic self-titled debut album in 1997, only to be dropped on the eve of release. A retooled and improved version, titled *Commencement*, was greeted by tumbleweed when it eventually emerged five long years later. By the time they released their swansong, *Phantasmagore*, in 2006, even the handful of people who had been listening had wandered off elsewhere. As brilliant as they might have been, Deadsy were just too arch for their own good – or maybe they were way ahead of the curve. That hasn't stopped Elijah Blue resurrecting the band in recent years, with the promise of a new album in 2021. We're not holding our breath to see how this one goes.

LISTEN TO: ***The Key To Gramercy Park*** **(*Commencement*, 2002)**

6 BATHORY

The number of people who know Bathory's name is in inverse proportion to those who could name even one of their songs. Like an extreme metal Ramones, they've become a cool name to drop for anyone looking for an instant shot of cool without actually having to listen to any of their music. A one-man project masterminded by teenage Swedish prodigy Thomas 'Quorthon' Forsberg, Bathory can lay claim to helping invent two separate genres. Their brilliantly raw mid-80s albums would be plundered for inspiration by every single black metal band in history; by the end of that decade, they were summoning Viking metal into being on such epically Odin-tastic albums as *Blood Fire Death* and *Hammerheart*. In a just world, Bathory would be lauded alongside Metallica as true metal innovators, but their influence barely extends beyond a cabal of extreme metal musicians – and even they'd be hard pushed to name a song from any of the albums Bathory released post-1990. Quorthon himself died of an undiagnosed heart problem in 2004 at the age of 38, ensuring his band's cult-hood would be preserved forever.

LISTEN TO: ***A Fine Day To Die*** **(*Blood Fire Death*, 1988)**

5 FAILURE

Such was the media's obsession with grunge's stripped-back approach to rock music in the mid 90s, that a band who played alternative rock inspired by a luscious base of Pink Floyd, The Beatles and Bowie's Berlin period never really stood a chance. Failure were scandalously ignored by the mainstream but, to those in the know, they were one of the best bands of the decade. Their masterpiece, 1996's *Fantastic Planet*, was tossed out with little promotional support from Warner Bros and barely heard by anyone. They split up a year later, with most people assuming they were another long-forgotten casualty of the music industry machine – though vocalist Ken Andrews has since blamed drugs. But as the years ticked by, their fans went on to form bands themselves; A Perfect Circle covered their song *The Nurse Who Loved Me* on 2003's *Thirteenth Step* album, and everyone from Deftones' Chino Moreno, to Limp Bizkit's Wes Borland and Hayley Williams of Paramore have name-checked Failure as an inspiration, leading to a new generation discovering their genius. *Fantastic Planet* is now rightly lauded as one of 90s rock's most definitive records. When they reunited in 2013, they were deservedly treated like the second coming.

LISTEN TO: ***Stuck On You*** **(*Fantastic Planet*, 1996)**

4 ACID BATH

Sludge metal's crash-landing into the swamps of Louisiana saw the nascent genre undergo a forced, rapid evolution. But while Eyehategod, Crowbar and Soilent Green were finding ways to flavour the genre's hardcore punk roots with everything from extreme metal and doom to stoner and blues, Acid Bath took the whole gumbo home and chewed it up until it came back out as the bleakest vision of a psychedelic trip. Acid Bath's two records are a masterclass in how to disregard genre boundaries, flying from groovy death metal butchery in the likes of *Jezebel* or *Cassie Eats Cockroaches* to a strain of blues-tinged doom on *Dead Girl* and *Graveflower* that could best embody death gospel 30 years before the style emerged. Dax Riggs' twisted, southern gothic poetry proved icing on the iconoclast cake, ensuring that even as sludge goes everywhere from the stars to a cyber-future, Acid Bath still inhabit a dimension entirely their own.

LISTEN TO: ***Scream Of The Butterfly*** **(*When The Kite String Pops*, 1994)**

Acid Bath: residents of their own dimension

PRESS

Beherit: stranger things

3 BEHERIT

Even by the individualistic standards black metal has always laid claim to, Finland's Beherit remain one of the most obstinately strange and divisive bands in the scene's 30-year history – a strand of rogue code written into its DNA. While Norway's second wave of black metal was still rearing its head in the early 90s, a parallel movement was springing up elsewhere; bands such as Canada's Blasphemy and America's Von were still inspired by the unruly, lo-fi racket of Venom, Hellhammer and their successor, Celtic Frost, but determined to use their primitivism not as a base but as a hammer to wield with ever greater force. If the influence of Blasphemy on Beherit was marked, along with Brazil's Sarcófago, Beherit's core duo – vocalist/guitarist Nuclear Holocausto Vengeance and drummer Sodomatic Slaughter – took the impervious repetition and gargled, sulphur-circulating vocals into yet more hermetic and otherworldly realms.

Beherit's reputation as the most cult of kvlt bands rests on their debut album proper, 1993's *Drawing Down The Moon*, which was so entranced by its own arcane sacraments that it even sounded like the practice of a cult. Initially, it also sounds like an affront, wherever you fall on the metal spectrum. Its monotonously parched, locked grooves and slavering, parallel-universe rasps no longer relied on the visceral, untamed rampage of their demos, but on an inhuman, primordial power that sounded like it was being stirred and brewed over the course of aeons.

Riling up parts of the Norwegian scene no end, becoming an object of mystical awe for others, *Drawing Down The Moon* is a singular black hole in the black metal firmament – opaque to outsiders, and an inescapable realm where all rational laws of music break down for those who ventured over its event horizon.

LISTEN TO: *Werewolf, Semen And Blood* (*Drawing Down The Moon*, 1993)

Watchtower: sitting on the summit of the über-technical/ progressive thrash mount

2 WATCHTOWER

Watchtower have been in a dreaded 'indefinite hiatus' holding pattern for the past half-decade, but ever since originally forming in 1982, the Texas outfit have positioned themselves atop the über-technical/progressive thrash mountain. And whether this hiatus eventually leads to a break-up or reunion, on top of that world the band remains. Bassist Doug Keyser, drummer Rick Colaluca, guitarist Ron Jarzombek and vocalist Alan Tecchio (along with previous members guitarist Billy White and vocalist Jason McMaster) may have had musicians' jaws unhinging since the first notes of their 1983 demos all the way through to their classic full-lengths – 1985's *Energetic Disassembly* and 1989's *Control And Resistance* through to final release 2016's *Concepts Of Math: Book One* EP – but those same slack-jawed fret watchers have also been humming earworms like *Meltdown, Asylum, Mayday In Kiev* and *The Fall Of Reason* all along. Herein lies the primary distinguishing factor separating this quartet from the competition: their ability to imbue mind-melting intricacy with dexterous hooks.

Also working to Watchtower's advantage – or detriment, according to your local po-faced thrash metal gatekeeper – and elevating this lot above their fellow prog-minded peers is how they counterbalanced prodigious talent, erudite skill and the cranial workouts of their compositions with trope destruction and a mile-wide irreverent streak. Rick Colaluca's drum kit was half-acoustic and half-electronic, their live show offered as many lessons in musical scholastics as circus clown tomfoolery, and they were known to write songs in adherence to self-imposed rules pertaining to key, note usage and chord selection. The carpal tunnel-inducing musicianship, Alan Tecchio's cloud-scraping warble and a steadfast adherence to their own path (witness the unreleased noise/improv track *Ballad Assassin*, which took violent umbrage with thrash metal's chasing of Metallica's success) made them outliers at a time when their testosterone-driven peers in Slayer, Destruction and Kreator were primarily thinking heavier, faster and meaner.

LISTEN TO: *Instruments Of Random Murder* (*Control And Resistance*, 1989)

PRESS

1

WOODS OF YPRES

Canadian blackened doom project Woods Of Ypres had gained a reputation for brilliance. Tragically, mastermind David Gold passed away before the release of his magnum opus

WORDS: TOM O'BOYLE

A qualified teacher with three university degrees, Woods Of Ypres mastermind David Gold was an intelligent man struggling to find his niche, as he testified on his song *Travelling Alone: 'I have searched and I have tried / To find a place where I can be / I love my homeland dearly, but never carved a place in society.'*

An accomplished multi-instrumentalist with a fervour for black metal, David found solace in music. His music was as much raw worship of the majestic Canadian wilderness as it was a vent for his bleakly rational observations of humanity. Woods albums *II-IV* articulated an evolution from raw black metal to the doom-laden gothic majesty of his magnum opus, *Woods 5: Grey Skies And Electric Light*.

It was a record that marked another fresh start, after years of a constantly changing line-up of supporting musicians. David was the sole creative mastermind behind Woods' music – until the day he recruited Joel Violette. Joel, a huge fan, couldn't believe what was happening. "I went from fan to lead guitarist in a day!" he laughs. "It was mind-boggling. I was very inspired by what David was doing for Canada's metal scene. *Woods II* is still one of my favourite albums, though it's now difficult to listen to."

Joel got to know David in 2005 when he ordered a copy of *Woods II* from him. Over the next few years they traded emails, Joel posting David demos for what would become *Canada 2010*, the first album in his still-active solo folk/black metal project, Thrawsunblat. "Then in 2009 David was like, 'Want me to drum on the record for you?' I was blown away. 'Yes, of course!'" he enthuses. "One of David's immense qualities was his ability to get stuff done."

David found a fertile partnership with Joel. For the first time, he didn't have to concentrate on writing everything himself, he and Joel writing half of the music each for *Woods 5*, giving him more time to focus on the record's finer details. "He used to joke that we were the Lennon and McCartney of Canadian black metal!" says Joel.

Written and recorded in just six weeks of July-August 2011 at Beach Road studios, Ontario, with producer Siegfried Meier, the results were stunning. The pealing solo and punchy gang shouts of *Career Suicide (Is Not Real Suicide)* offered hope, juxtaposed with the frustrated lamentation of *Kiss My Ashes (Goodbye)*, which, as Joel recalls, was inspired by the death of Type O Negative phenom Peter Steele. "Type O were a huge influence on David," he remembers. "That they became so popular after Peter died drove him bonkers."

His frustration is clear in the starkly delivered lyrics: *'We miss them so much / Now that they are gone / Took them for granted / For living, so long.'*

"THERE WAS A MESSIANIC FEEL TO HIS LYRICS"

JOEL VIOLETTE

Tragically, David was killed in a car accident in December 2011. He was just 31 years old. Two months later, *Woods 5* was released, the reception and interpretation of its lyrics irrevocably altered. Upon first listen, it is alarmingly foreshadowing – a captivating journey through mournful melody and exhilarating extremity. The more you listen, the more David's dour, prophetic objectivity impresses.

Joel, having only heard the instrumentals, remembers being startled hearing David's vocals on the tracks for the first time – existential anguish in that funereal baritone; his scathing roar. "David was a powerful lyricist. He had a cool perspective – 'Yes, modern life can be grey and cold, but there's more to it.' He would often in songs discuss a problem and then present the solution – there was a messianic feel to it… when David passed it gave a very different feel to the lyrics."

Now David's gone, Joel is often the man looked to for insight – a task he's struggled with. "A week after David passed, I was asked [by a journalist] 'What's the future of the band?' I forget exactly what I said, 'We don't know what the future for Woods is', or something. I took a bunch of flak for saying that – clearly you can't make a Woods Of Ypres album without David Gold. I guess I was trying to find hope," he says. "It stings, but there's nothing that can be done about it."

Woods 5 deservedly won the 2013 Juno (the Canadian equivalent of the Grammys) for Metal/Hard Music Album Of The Year. That it isn't spoken of in the same breath as the likes of *October Rust*, David's heroes Type O Negative's crowning achievement, is a shame, and something that will hopefully be rectified with time.

"I feel very fortunate to have contributed to a slice of it," concludes Joel. "This fantastic Canadian legacy that David built with his vision and work ethic. Over the years, a whole cast of characters were involved in realising that vision. There's a lot of people now making music who otherwise wouldn't be."

Testimony to this lies with *Heart Of Gold* – a tribute album released in 2013, featuring 19 bands made up of his peers covering their favourite Woods songs. That David inspired so many to create is a fitting legacy and reaffirms the message at the core of his masterwork. *Woods 5* reminds us all to make the most our lives, and those we share them with.

LISTEN TO: *Lightning & Snow* (*Woods 5: Grey Skies & Electric Light*, 2012)

PRESS/EARACHE,/ANTHONY J ARMSTRONG

Woods Of Ypres' music is a stunning legacy

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE

Black Sabbath's first two albums might have patented metal, but *Master Of Reality* perfected it. Beyond the war concerns, weed smoking and world-beating ambition, it spawned a thousand metal sub-genres

WORDS: HENRY YATES

LONDON FEATURES/AVALON. ADDITIONAL QUOTES: MICK WALL.

It was the dawn of ’71, and Black Sabbath were bulletproof. During their first ferocious year as a recording band, the lineup of Ozzy Osbourne, Tony Iommi, Geezer Butler and Bill Ward had swung a wrecking ball through rock’s world order, forging the metal genre with 1970’s brutal double bill of *Black Sabbath* and *Paranoid*, exposing the 60s gods as hairless pipsqueaks, and deflecting the barbs of a bemused music press like peashooters against a panzer tank.

“We had proved against all odds that we were a viable band, much to the annoyance of our critics,” bassist Geezer Butler reflects, a half-century later. “We were full of confidence with our first two releases [which ultimately went gold and platinum], our tours were selling out everywhere, so we knew our instincts were right about our music. It felt like we were an unstoppable juggernaut.”

In February ’71, the sea change was evident as the band and long-standing producer Rodger Bain rolled into Notting Hill’s Island Studios for third album, *Master Of Reality*. As no-mark provincial longhairs, Sabbath’s first two LPs had been rushed affairs, their paymasters at the Vertigo label tapping the wristwatch. Now, as galacticos, the band’s carte blanche ran from sprawling studio time to 24-track technology, inviting them to test the boundaries.

“We were excited to see where our writing would take us,” remembers Geezer. “It was quite an adventure in itself. We wanted the heavier songs to be heavier than anything we’d done before. *Master Of Reality* established the band as the purveyors of the heaviest music up to that point, and said, ‘Go ahead, beat that.’”

Black Sabbath: the undisputed masters

Appalled by the “screaming kids” who hoovered up 1970’s *Paranoid* single, Black Sabbath had sworn off penning anything too hooky. But during this imperious phase, the lineup couldn’t help but spit out shadowy anthems where stadium hooks met jet-black lyrics. “Sabbath was all about the dark reality of life,” explains the bassist. “We’d grown up in the aftermath of World War Two, and Aston, where we were from, still had bombed-out buildings and neighbours with war wounds. At the time of *Master Of Reality*, Vietnam was raging, the Cold War was at its coldest, the Troubles in Northern Ireland were close to home. A few others were singing about the underside of life, but we had the heaviness to hammer the subjects home.”

While the jackhammer *After Forever* found Geezer exploring organised religion with a candour no previous rock lyricist had dared (*‘Would you like to see the Pope on the end of a rope?’*), another socially charged fan favourite taking shape at Island was *Children Of The Grave*, on which the bassist’s anti-conflict manifesto ran with the *Paranoid* album’s *War Pigs*. With Ozzy Osbourne’s yowl articulating the fears of a generation bound for a wooden box (*‘Must the world live in the shadow of atomic fear? / Can they win the fight for peace or will they disappear?’*), the song’s malevolent punch came from Tony Iommi’s pivotal move to downtune his Gibson SG by three semitones, to C#.

Practically, this was to ease the pain of fretting with fingers that had been lacerated in an industrial accident before Sabbath broke through. But with Geezer matching the drop on bass, a defining side-effect was to thicken the band’s fathoms-deep sound for a riff that galloped like apocalyptic stallions.

“I love the rhythm of *Children Of The Grave*,” notes Geezer. “It was unique at the time, a menacing, marching vibe. The downtuning definitely summoned the advent of doom metal and heaviness in general. Too many bands to mention have told me they were inspired by it.”

Recorded at the same bowel-churning pitch, *Lord Of This World* was a rolling boulder of a song, while *Into The Void*’s telepathic proto-sludge groove belied the challenges of

Ozzy nose the score

GETTY

"SABBATH WAS ALL ABOUT THE DARK REALITY OF LIFE"

GEEZER BUTLER

catching it in the bottle, with drummer Bill Ward struggling to ride the shifting time signatures and Tony writing in his memoirs that Ozzy tripped on the flows of warped poetry.

"He had to sing really rapidly: *'Rocket engines burning fuel so fast / Up into the night sky they blast'*, quick words like that. Geezer had written the words out for him. Seeing him try was hilarious."

But heaviosity wasn't the only currency on *Master Of Reality*. Opening like a flourish from a medieval banquet, *Orchid* was a wistful acoustic tumble that clocked just 90 seconds. Shorter still, *Embryo* was an Eastern-sounding thumbnail sketch that can't have thrilled label execs. More substance came from the slow-burn *Solitude*, where the hypnotic cycle of Tony's lick waltzed with haunting flute, and Ozzy sang with a grace that countered his berserker reputation.

"The mellow tracks make the heavy tracks sound even heavier," reasons Geezer. "Plus, if you're stoned while listening, or if you're on acid, things can get intense, so it's nice to come down before the onslaught. Hearing *Solitude* now, it has a sort of moody blues feel, especially with Tony's flute playing. It shows how good Ozzy's more melodic vocals are, too."

No band was better qualified to write the soundtrack for smoking sessions. Geezer recalls that "we never got totally blasted while recording songs – listening back was when the real spliffing began".

But stroll through Island in '71 and you only had to follow your nose to find Sabbath at work, the band's lifestyle summed up by the hacking cough that opens *Master*'s thundering stoner anthem, *Sweet Leaf*.

"That's me," recalled Tony. "Ozzy rolled this big joint… I had a couple of puffs and nearly choked myself. They left the tape running and it turned into the ideal start for *Sweet Leaf*."

"We used to smoke pounds of the shit, man," Ozzy told *High Times*. "We used to buy it by the fuckin' sackful. We used to be so fucked-up all the time. Wake up in the morning, start the day with a spliff, go to bed with it…"

At last, in July 1971, Sabbath emerged from this heady fug of weed and ambition with the third album that changed their trajectory. On paper, *Master Of Reality* wasn't much: just six 'proper' songs and a 34-minute run time. Nor did it appease the rock press, with *Rolling Stone*'s enfant terrible Lester Bangs sniping at the "thick, plodding, almost ▶

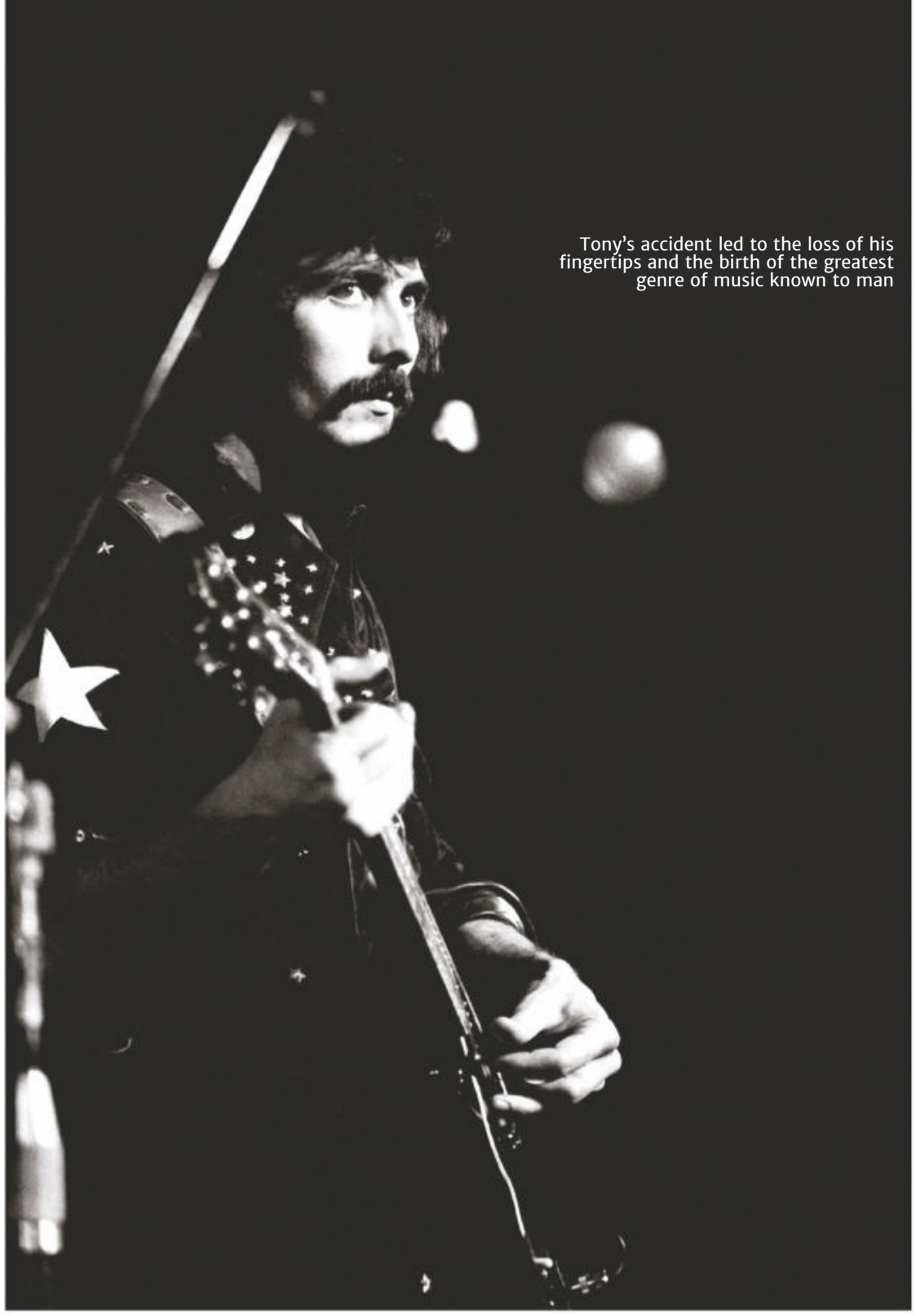
Black Sabbath (left to right): Bill Ward, Tony Iommi, Ozzy Osbourne, Geezer Butler

arrhythmic steel wool curtains of sound". Geezer shrugs: "Before Sabbath, I saw *Rolling Stone*'s review of Zeppelin's first album, which I loved and they trashed. I realised how out of touch and worthless critics could be. So when they trashed Sabbath, it was like a badge of honour."

To grassroots rock fans, however, *Master Of Reality*'s earth-shaking impact spread ripples through the ages, hitting the UK at No.5 and a breakthrough US No.8 on its march to two million sales, and catching the ear of rock's next generation. And while the music dared their peers to compete, the lineup also raised the bar for excess. On previous US tours, there had been surgically enhanced women of easy virtue ("My first experience of silicone tits," recalled Ozzy) and snowy mountains of celebrity-grade cocaine ("We used to have a guy travel round with a suitcase full of kilos of that shit"). Now, in the summer of '71, an epic US tour raised the stakes, the band stepping aboard a private jet where "you literally couldn't move for booze," according to Rick Wakeman of support act, Yes.

"It was like four kids let loose in Toys R Us," recalls Geezer of the ensuing carnage. "As to be expected of four blokes in their early 20s, we went a bit wild. Booze, women, drugs, nice hotels, private planes – all of it

TOPFOTO/PA IMAGES



Tony's accident led to the loss of his fingertips and the birth of the greatest genre of music known to man

paid for by what we loved doing. But as with everything, too much of a good thing has its downside."

Released from the studio's microcosm, *Master Of Reality*'s sticky aftermath exposed the hairline cracks that would eventually shatter the classic lineup. Bill has cited the band's intake of "uppers, downers, Quaaludes, whatever you want", and the drummer told *Classic Rock* of the moment those triumphant days turned sour. "It was after *Master Of Reality* that I remember Geezer broaching the issue for the first time of how out of control everything had become. He started saying he was getting tired…"

"The secret is moderation," says Geezer. "Once that becomes addiction, the shine slowly wears off and you start to question the whole meaning of everything. With such a gruelling schedule, we were taking more and more substances to keep us going, instead of taking time out to breathe. We wore ourselves out in the end, and the dream became nightmarish at times."

No band could maintain such appetites. Remarkably, Sabbath's hot streak lasted until 1973's *Sabbath Bloody Sabbath* ("It was downhill all the way after that," says Ozzy). But a half-century later, *Master Of Reality* marks the final time that metal's founding fathers functioned as a fist-tight unit.

"*Master Of Reality* is where we found ourselves," Bill told music journalist and *Hammer* legend Malcolm Dome. "I know people feel that Sabbath invented heavy metal with our debut album – and that is true to some extent. But I believe that it's with *Master Of Reality* that we proved the potential and power of the music." H

"*ROLLING STONE* TRASHED SABBATH. IT WAS A BADGE OF HONOUR"

GEEZER BUTLER

A PURPLE VINYL REISSUE OF *MASTER OF REALITY* IS OUT ON JUNE 12 VIA BMG

GETTY. GIANT LOGO: BIG JOHN

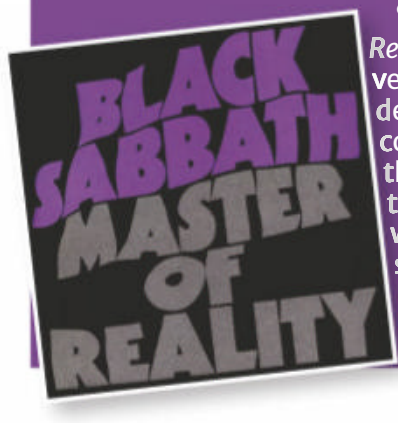
THE BOLD TYPE

How *Master Of Reality*'s artwork came to define Black Sabbath

If Sabbath's early musical output was faultless, the band had a more chequered start when it came to sleeve art. There was the flesh-creeping debut album with the ghoul girl at Mapledurham Mill. There was the *Paranoid* sleeve, rendered nonsensical after the album's proposed title of *War Pigs* was dropped ("What the fuck does a bloke dressed as a pig with a sword got to do with being paranoid?" pondered Ozzy in the *Classic Albums* series).

At first glance in '71, *Master Of Reality*'s cock-eyed lettering seemed a little throwaway and cartoonish (described by Tony in his autobiography as "slightly Spinal Tap-ish, only well before Spinal Tap"). Yet the design has endured for a half-century, not only becoming the definitive Sabbath font (it appears across the band's merchandise and endured right up to 2017's swansong live release, *The End*), but making socio-political ripples last June when Rage Against The Machine's Tom Morello appeared on Instagram with his 96-year-old mother, wearing a *Master Of Reality* T-shirt adapted to read 'Black Lives Matter'.

Geezer was quick to comment ("Nice shirt & nice sentiment & awesome mum"), and that same month, Sabbath announced an official Black Lives Matter T-shirt, with all profits going to the movement.



"*Master Of Reality* is a very minimal design," considers the bassist today, "but with a very strong image. Timeless…"

SYNTHWAVE IS DEAD

Or at least that's what Perturbator, aka James Kent, has concluded. New album *Lustful Sacraments* sees him move into post-punk territory, away from the scene he helped create

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS· PICTURES: DAVID FITT

PERTURBATOR

By the end of summer 2017, James Kent had reached a fork in his neon-paved road. That year, the Parisian producer had hit the metal festival circuit across Europe, working glowstick-waving metalheads into a frenzy with his lurid synthwave project, Perturbator. Along with scene mates Carpenter Brut and Gost, he'd turned electronic nostalgia into big business in metal – one of the more surprising phenomena *Hammer* has witnessed. But behind the thundering beats and 80s Day-Glo imagery, the adrenaline rush was wearing off. James was bored.

"You can see these synths being put into everything," he complained to *Hammer* later that year, pointing out that between the numerous retro acts jumping on the bandwagon, and the 80s aesthetic cropping up in everything from *Thor: Ragnarok* to *Blade Runner 2049* and *Stranger Things*, synthwave was nearing saturation point. Looking back on previous conversations with James, you can see why this would be a problem. Intense and uncompromising, he's always taken his music seriously, revelling in his role as an outsider and enjoying his position as an artist falling between synthwave and metal.

Fearing the scene he was spearheading had become a "gimmick", in September 2017 he dropped the EP *New Model*, which eschewed the neon highway for a sinister, industrial landscape that stretched out towards a dark horizon. "I think I had said everything I could have said with synthwave," he says today, from his home in the Parisian suburbs. "There's only so many albums you can make trying to capture nostalgia or the same vibe. When I started *New Model*, I pretty much told myself, 'Don't try to sound like synthwave', but I cannot completely remove it from my music. There's always going to be this DNA of synthesisers, but it's important to show [that] doesn't necessarily mean 80s retro. It can be something else."

The seeds were sown for that "something else" almost eight years ago, when James was just 20. Having grown up on a diet of thrash and death metal, he was introduced to post-punk and goth bands by his mother, French music journalist Laurence Romance, who got him into Siouxsie And The Banshees and Bauhaus. Having built his confidence by steering *New Model* into industrial waters, he knew straight off the bat that he wanted to create a follow-up that would carry him further away from his synthwave roots. The result is fifth album *Lustful Sacraments* – a gloomy, decadent and atmospheric trip inspired by classic electro-punk and industrial electronic acts such as DAF and Front 242, as well as his favourite goth and post-punk albums: The Cure's *Pornography*, The Sisters Of Mercy's *Floodland* and Killing Joke's self-titled debut.

No one, least of all James, expected Perturbator's brash brand of electronica to find a home in metal's underground. But *Lustful Sacraments* feels like a natural fit – something that could be filed alongside other recent reimaginings of goth's brooding past, like Grave Pleasures' *Motherblood* and *Mana* by Unto Others (formerly Idle Hands).

"This is something I always wanted to do, but I didn't have the skills to do it," he admits. "It involves more than synthesisers; there's a lot of guitars in the album and a lot of vocals. This is the album I always wanted to make in a way, but it was only in 2017 [following the release of *New Model*] when I decided, 'OK, now I am ready to make this album. I can make this sound good now and it's not going to be clumsy."

Although James started writing immediately after releasing *New Model*, he toured throughout 2018 and 2019, so three years passed without any recording. But as COVID-19 hit in 2020,

"I'M NOT A VERY GOOD SINGER!"

JAMES KENT

and France went into lockdown, he found himself with the time and headspace to get stuck in. The album came together quickly in a matter of months, James laying down all the electronics and guitars at his home studio.

"At first I wanted to sing on the album, like really sing," he says. "But I quickly noticed that after a bunch of failed attempts that I'm not a very good singer. So I thought, pardon my French, 'Well, fuck me, I'm not going to be able to do it, I'm not going to be able to finish the album. [Then] I realised there's a lot of bands like Joy Division that just talk, so thought I could talk on the album and not have to do harmonies and be a good singer. That kind of works and it fits the vibe I was going for."

Post-punk's uneasy charm comes from its imperfections, and it's that rawness that *Lustful Sacraments* taps into so effectively. A world away from the over-saturated gleam of his earlier material, tracks such as *Excess* and *The Other Place* are seductively melancholic – an invitation into a mysterious and lawless corner of the dancefloor. Elsewhere, James's long-time inspirations – 80s exploitation movies, slasher flicks and John Carpenter horror scores – loom over tracks like fiendish single *Death Of A Soul*. There's even a moment in the song's video where liquid spurts from inside a casino slot machine, like blood pouring from the Overlook Hotel elevators in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*.

"This album is about bad habits, dissatisfaction and addiction," explains James. "An overall look at how we, as a species, lean towards self-destruction. It is set in a fictitious city called Xanadu where nothing is forbidden and everything is free. People party all day, every day, abuse drugs, go crazy…"

And what's your take on that?

"I'm definitely not pointing the finger at it," he responds, before we even finish the question. "I'm not saying it's bad, because it's something I do also as well, indulging in alcohol and drugs sometimes. I think it's a very neutral stance. More like a scene from a movie, like when you see [Kubrick's surreal 1999 thriller] *Eyes Wide Shut* and you're like, 'Is this bad or good?' I just wanted to illicit this strange feeling of no inhibitions."

On learning the story of excess behind the album, it's not remotely surprising to hear it was partly inspired by Las Vegas, alongside the dark majesty of 40s and 50s film noir and, in particular, Fritz Lang's art deco 1927 classic *Metropolis*, whose influence ebbs in through the album's narrative and brassy cover art.

"I don't think I need to explain how important that movie is culturally and artistically," says James. "The way it portrays luxury, debauchery and wealth at others' expense, along with still-relevant questions about transhumanism and social hierarchies, is definitely something that I took inspiration from."

Those same contradictions are what fascinates and repulses James about Las Vegas, too. He's played the city twice, the first time in 2017, supporting none other than John Carpenter himself on his Anthology tour, during which the Master of Horror performed his classic movie scores such as *Halloween* and *The Fog*. "It's a very strange relationship I have with Las Vegas," explains James. "It was always a blast and I didn't want to leave – maybe something that this album is about. But it's a good

James Kent: See ya, synthwave!
Hello, industrial and post-punk!

thing I'm not staying in Vegas; I would have lost myself there."

Is the album about his own experiences of excess and self-destruction? "Maybe in a way," he admits carefully. "There's definitely tracks on there that were written in a place of, 'I fucked up, and I didn't fuck up.' There's a bit of a personal take on it, but that's too personal for me to share with the people who are going to listen to the album; I'd rather they make their own story from it. Take their own message."

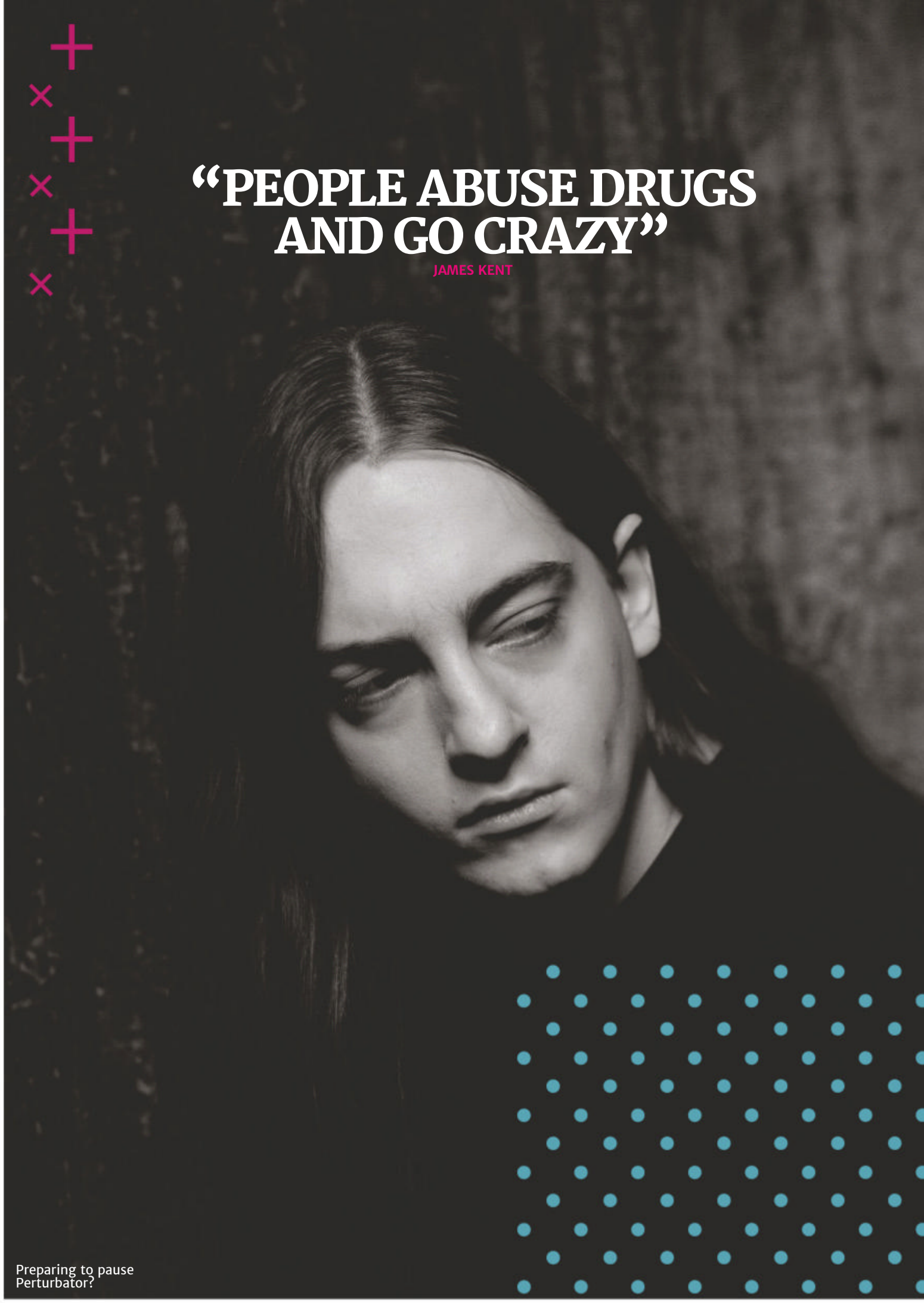
James might be coy about revealing some of the stories and experiences that have fed *Lustful Sacraments*, but he's more forthcoming when we ask what the future holds for both him and his erstwhile scene. "I personally have no idea where synthwave is going," he says dismissively. "I'm not really involved in it, to be honest. As for me, I think I need probably a little break. [*Lustful Sacraments*] is not the last album, it's not going to be the end, but I'm probably going to take a little break from [Perturbator], or maybe do other projects."

Breaking the shackles that tied him to synthwave has given James a new artistic freedom, not least the opportunity to release new material with his side band, Ruin Of Romantics. In January this year, they put out two-track single *Self Control*, allowing James the chance to explore a more ambient, shoegazey approach to goth, proving his creativity isn't about to fade out like the neon glow of the synthwave scene. "If I make an album, I want to give something to people that they might not know that they liked or have discovered," he says defiantly. "I don't want to rehash anything."

LUSTFUL SACRAMENTS IS OUT ON MAY 28 VIA BLOOD MUSIC. PERTURBATOR PLAY LONDON IN NOVEMBER

"PEOPLE ABUSE DRUGS AND GO CRAZY"

JAMES KENT



Preparing to pause Perturbator?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

James explains the cultural influences behind new album *Lustful Sacraments*

METROPOLIS (1927)
"The movie is about a wealthy upper class that asserts their dominance over the lower-class workers, who are the lifeblood of the city. These workers then go on to rebel against this status quo, and to kickstart their rebellion."

THE METROPOLIS OF TOMORROW (1929)
[Book written and illustrated by Hugh Ferriss]: "There is a lot of majesty and splendour to Hugh Ferriss's architecture. It almost seems like a strange nightmare, one where the sun never rises and seemingly unoccupied massive buildings cast giant shadows over the city below. This is something I wanted to capture in *Lustful Sacraments*."

NIGHT TIME (KILLING JOKE, 1985)
"This album is the perfect balance between organic sounds and synthesizers. The writing is absolutely genius, with very simple but extremely efficient compositions, and is in many ways one of the greatest prototypes for what goth-rock music would become afterwards."

BLADE RUNNER (1982)
"It's no secret that this movie and its soundtrack have always been an enormous source of inspiration for me in all of my works. The masterfully crafted soundtrack by Vangelis is also a character of its own and evokes foreboding feelings of melancholy and loneliness."

FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS (2010)
"My favourite videogame of all time. Their version of Las Vegas is completely ruined by mankind's own hubris. The only things still standing are the casinos on the strip – a reminder that greed is all that's left of this world."

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EVILE WERE MEANT TO BE THRASH'S NEXT SUPERSTARS

…but after leading the UK revival of the 00s, guitarist Ol Drake quit and the band stalled. Now they're back, with a new – but familiar – singer

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: KARL SMITH

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Ol is back, with a new string to his bow

In August 2013, Ol Drake hit breaking point. He'd been the guitarist of thrash metal darlings Evile for 14 years – the only job he'd ever known – and the band had just returned from a 20,000-mile round trip to Taiwan. The odyssey to perform at Formoz Festival in the capital, Taipei, had taken five days – an entire working week, and time spent apart from friends and family. They came away from the experience about £20 richer.

"Everything just screamed, 'This isn't going anywhere!'" Ol remembers today. "We were putting so much effort into everything and not making any money. [I thought], 'How much longer can we be the band that's just about to make that step up and properly go pro?'"

Less than a month after Evile's first-ever Asian gig, in came the press release: Ol had quit. The industry he'd dreamed of excelling in since he was 16 had chewed him up and spat him out, rewarding more than a decade of graft with financial instability. Burned out, he settled down with his new partner, Natalie, and started a job as a textiles researcher. Later, they welcomed a daughter. It seemed an unceremonious end to the career of a musician who'd recently been hailed as a national thrash saviour, but personally it was a much-needed and positive change of scene. "It was good to get away and do normal things, even though it sounds like the least attractive thing in the world," he admits.

Ol was still a schoolboy when, in 1999, he joined the band that would become Evile. His older brother, frontman Matt Drake, had been jamming with drummer Ben Carter in the music room at school. The fact that Ol could only play Metallica songs set the trajectory; on recruiting bassist Mike Alexander, the quartet became a tribute act, at a time when thrash couldn't have been less fashionable. Genre leaders Metallica and Megadeth had long since abandoned the style; others such as Death Angel, Dark Angel and Exodus had broken up.

Says Ol, "Thrash was a joke: 'Anything that isn't Metallica isn't worth listening to.' That's another reason we didn't write our own music; it seemed redundant. The only reason we started [writing] was because when people clapped after our gigs, we thought, 'They're not clapping us, really; they're clapping Metallica. We need to write our own stuff!'"

By 2004, Evile had composed and recorded an EP. Concurrently, a buzz started emerging from the US: there were other young thrash bands out there! And the likes of Municipal Waste and Toxic Holocaust weren't just accruing underground hype – they'd soon ink deals with prestigious labels such as Relapse and Earache.

"I remember hearing about Municipal Waste and thinking, 'Thank fuck someone else is doing this as well so we don't look stupid!'" Ol laughs.

A set at Bloodstock 2006 led to Evile becoming the biggest British name in the growing revival, as they were swept

"WE WERE PUTTING SO MUCH EFFORT IN, FOR NO MONEY"

OL DRAKE

up by Earache founder Digby Pearson the next day. The band jokingly asked if *Master Of Puppets* producer Flemming Rasmussen could man the dials on their debut album; after receiving a surprise OK, they were flown to Sweet Silence Studios in Copenhagen, Denmark.

"It was daunting. There were all the Metallica gold discs. We were playing through the desk ...*Puppets* and *Ride The Lightning* were recorded on; that was freaky enough, but Flemming, if I messed up a guitar part, would go, 'James wouldn't have done that!'"

Evile returned from Denmark with *Enter The Grave*: a thrash throwback that revitalised the frantic riffs and Hetfieldian barks of the Bay Area heyday.

"When it came out, one magazine said we were carrying the genre's revival on our shoulders," recalls Ol.

It set the precedent for a rebirth of the UK scene, as upstarts such as Savage Messiah and Shrapnel exploded (see Metal Thrashing Mad, p.79). Even contemporaries such as Gama Bomb suddenly attained bigger record deals after its release.

However, the subsequent half-decade demolished Ol. While touring Sweden in October 2009, bassist Mike passed away as a result of a pulmonary embolism; the band had barely been grieving a month when a UK tour was announced. The following year, they played countless shows, but struck a glass ceiling when a lack of income meant they couldn't graduate to more high-profile treks. The dismal remuneration from travelling to Taiwan proved to be the last straw.

After leaving, Ol released a solo album called *Old Rake* – with the proviso he'd never do a single gig to support it. From 2015 to 2018, he only touched his guitar once, to play a song for his daughter. His ex-bandmates replaced him with Fallen Fate's Piers Donno-Fuller but, over five years, they barely wrote a thing. It wasn't working out.

"I think Matt wanted to concentrate on getting the band tight over new material," Ol posits. "I think Piers got frustrated about that. I spoke to Matt and I joked, 'Give me a call, then.' After that, I genuinely thought, 'Wait… why not?'"

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Evile (left to right): Ben Carter, Joel Graham, Ol Drake, Adam Smith

With family and a stable job now supporting him, Ol felt confident about going back to Evile. His return was confirmed in April 2018 and, by July the following year, he'd written enough riffs for a new album. All he needed was Matt's lyrics. "It was a year of waiting and there was nothing," says Ol. "I was frustrated but it was understandable – he just didn't have the time anymore."

The elder Drake had taken a day job at Kirklees Council but was also enduring a string of health scares. In recent years Matt had battled breathing problems, unyielding lethargy and, scariest of all, signs of a pulmonary embolism – the same thing that had killed Mike. "As soon as I heard those words, I dropped and I thought, 'Will I ever see my kids again?'" he told *ExaminerLive* in 2019.

Matt officially stepped down in 2020 – a decision that improved his health and his relationship with Ol: "When Matt and I aren't in Evile, we get along better, because we're just brothers talking about films and stuff," says Ol. "I speak to him every day."

Ol hired Riptide's Adam Smith – a friend of drummer Ben's – as rhythm guitarist, while he fell into the vocalist role after demoing lyric ideas. "I know what metal fans are like and they don't want a new singer," he explains, "so we thought the path of least resistance would be a familiar face singing."

Evile are returning with *Hell Unleashed*, a blistering maelstrom that exudes rejuvenation. Just as ferocious as *Enter The Grave*, riffs thunderously swirl, while a groove monster such as *Incarcerated* would feel at home on *South Of Heaven*. Ol's undisciplined roars inject a brutish edge à la Sepultura, as he seethes about typically metal themes of zombies, Satan and *The Thing*. It's a generic comeback – but that's precisely the point. "This is my first effort, so I'm not going to be Shakespeare," he grins.

As for Ol, the blossoming frontman couldn't be further from the vexation that drove him away eight years ago, and the future of Evile is in safe hands. "I started writing the next album before this one was even finished," he chuckles happily. "New material will probably start in late 2021."

Welcome back, Evile.

"IT WAS DAUNTING TO SEE THE METALLICA GOLD DISCS"

OL DRAKE

***HELL UNLEASHED* IS OUT ON APRIL 30 VIA NAPALM**

BOXOUT: PRESS

METAL THRASHING MAD

The UK thrash bands that followed in Evile's wake

SAVAGE MESSIAH
After joining Candlelight Records (one-time home of Emperor and Opeth), the Londoners made their own splash by blending thrash with NWOBHM pomp. Early highlights such as *Silent Empire* and *Carnival Of Souls* weren't just fast; their flashy leads and choruses explored vintage Maiden.
Listen to: *Plague Of Conscience* (2012)

SHRAPNEL
When you've signed with Candlelight Records and twice been produced by Russ Russell (Napalm Death, At The Gates, Dimmu Borgir), you know you're a big deal. Shrapnel are quick enough to rival Suicidal Tendencies and early Sepultura, and their refrains have only strengthened over time, too.
Listen to: *The Virus Conspires* (2014)

REIGN OF FURY
Debut EP *Psycho Intentions* may have had major Anthrax vibes, but this Cheltenham crew quickly found their niche in progressive thrash. Second (and best) album *Death Be Thy Shepherd* featured 10-minute-plus songs jam-packed with barrelling riffs and creative solos that kept the pedal to the metal.
Listen to: *Death Be Thy Shepherd* (2015)

THE BLEEDING
Formed in 2010, this quartet were latecomers to Britain's thrash revival – by the release of their 2017 debut album, the scene had wound down. However, its death metal screeches and tremolo picking made *Rites Of Absolution* a flooring last gasp from a faded movement.
Listen to: *Rites Of Absolution* (2017)

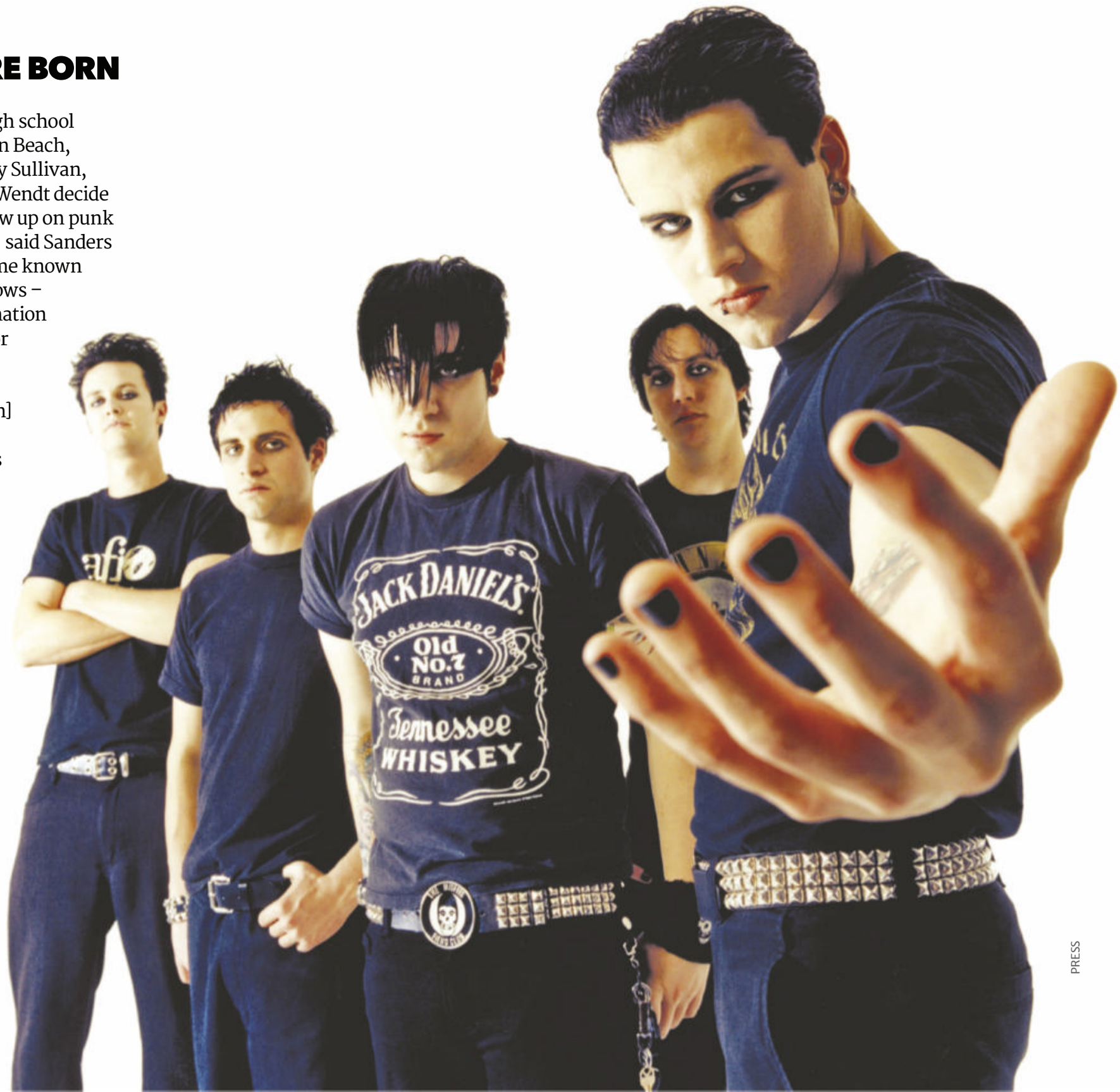
15 MOMENTS THAT DEFINED AVENGED

As Avenged Sevenfold's debut album hits the big 2-0, we relive the triumphs and the tragedies that took the Orange County metalcore crew from school band to arena megastars

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

AVENGED ARE BORN (1999)

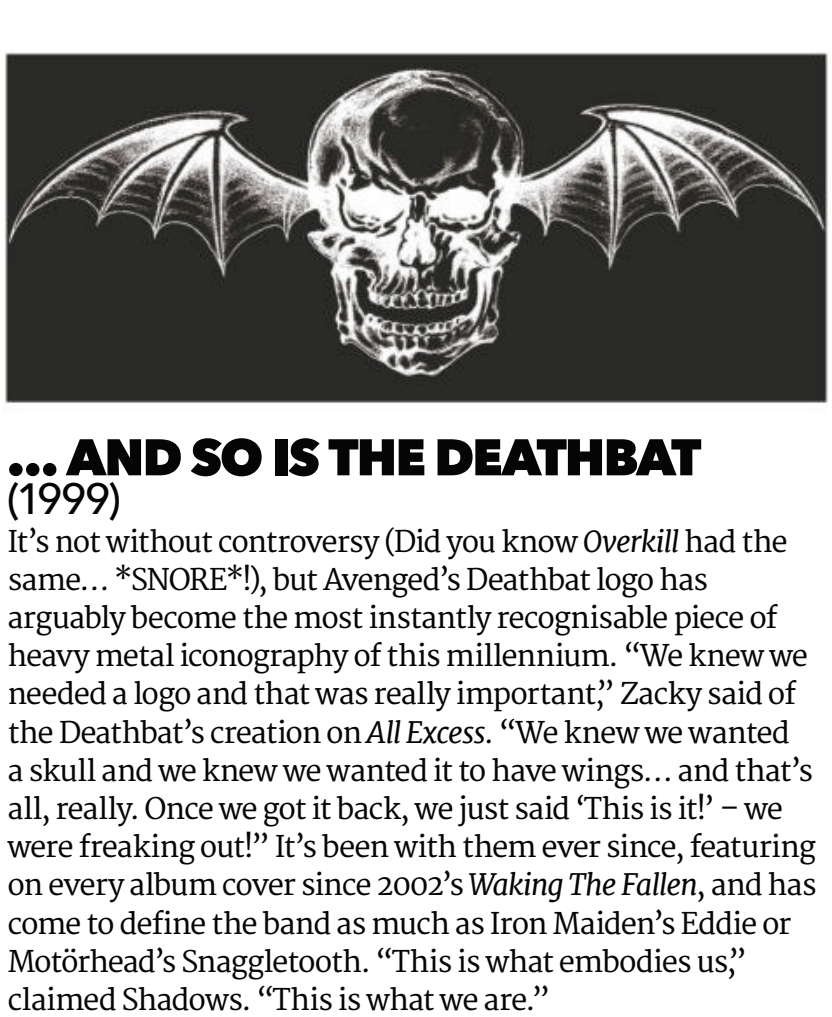
In March 1999, three high school friends from Huntington Beach, California named Jimmy Sullivan, Matt Sanders and Matt Wendt decide to form a band. "We grew up on punk rock and power chords," said Sanders – who would later become known to the world as M. Shadows – when recalling the formation of Avenged Sevenfold for the band's *All Excess* documentary. "I met The Rev [Jimmy Sullivan] in second grade and he ruled the drums; he was laughing at my band because we just played straight-ahead punk rock. We knew he was too good to be in our band, but we asked him anyway and he just said, 'I guess I will.' He only joined because we were friends." The band soon found guitarist Zachary Barker – AKA Zacky Vengeance – to complete the original line-up. Little did the young men know it, but metal's next superstar band had just been born.



PRESS

... AND SO IS THE DEATHBAT (1999)

It's not without controversy (Did you know *Overkill* had the same... *SNORE*!), but Avenged's Deathbat logo has arguably become the most instantly recognisable piece of heavy metal iconography of this millennium. "We knew we needed a logo and that was really important," Zacky said of the Deathbat's creation on *All Excess*. "We knew we wanted a skull and we knew we wanted it to have wings... and that's all, really. Once we got it back, we just said 'This is it!' – we were freaking out!" It's been with them ever since, featuring on every album cover since 2002's *Waking The Fallen*, and has come to define the band as much as Iron Maiden's Eddie or Motörhead's Snaggletooth. "This is what embodies us," claimed Shadows. "This is what we are."



A record deal *and* the addition of one Synyster Gates? It's all go now, lads!

THEY INK THEIR FIRST DEAL (2001)

After a number of local shows and a couple of demos, Avenged got the call from Belgian hardcore label Good Life Recordings, who had released records from the likes of As Friends Rust and Poison The Well, offering them the chance to record an album. Youthful exuberance took over and the band reveal on *All Excess* of how they signed a one-page contract that entitled them to a measly $2,000 advance to pay for their 2001 debut, *Sounding The Seventh Trumpet*. "We didn't know how the music industry worked," recalls Zacky. "We didn't really care, we just wanted to put out a CD." The album created a bit of a buzz, but the most crucial moment was Avenged roping in local guitarist Brian Haner Jnr to play on a re-recorded version of the song *To End The Rapture* after the album's release. He soon changed his name to Synyster Gates and joined the band full time.

PRESS. GETTY

Killswitch Engage: metalcore megastars

METALCORE RISES... SO DO AVENGED (2003)

By 2003, metalcore and the New Wave Of American Heavy Metal was beginning to usurp the previously dominant nu metal scene. Led at first by Killswitch Engage and Lamb Of God, Avenged Sevenfold arguably perfected their own eyeliner-smeared version of the style with their second album, *Waking The Fallen*. Bassist Johnny Christ had replaced Matt Wendt the year before, so the classic line-up of the band was established, and the record was a massive critical and commercial leap forward. Offering savage, metallic riffs, a new-found sense of melody, some brooding, deep gothic textures and a sense of restless creativity, it was beloved by fans and has gone on to be certified platinum in the US with sales of over one million copies. Eighteen years later, it's easy to pinpoint *Waking The Fallen* as the moment A7X officially arrived.

M. SHADOWS DITCHES SCREAMING (2005)

Even at this early stage of their career, Avenged were not content with resting on their laurels. With metalcore's popularity rising, but the genre's limitations proving to be artistically unsatisfying for them, Avenged's frontman made a hugely divisive decision: to quit the screamed vocals of their previous two albums for their third release, 2005's *City Of Evil*. Prior to it coming out, Shadows told MTV: "None of our favourite bands are super-extreme, they just write really good, melodic songs, that are still heavy. So, we decided we didn't want to scream anymore. We wanted to make rock songs for the new ages." The approach enraged purists, but it worked: the album's Guns'n'Metallica mash-up brought them a whole new audience, selling 30,000 copies in its first week and seeing Avenged peak at No.30 on the US Billboard Top 200, before eventually going platinum.

M. Shadows: scream no more

Winnerrrrrrrrs! Ready to party

THEY CRASH THE MTV AWARDS (2006)

Proof of just how far a reach *City Of Evil* gave the band was the MTV Awards 2006. In the category for Best New Artist In A Video, nominees Avenged stood out like a sore thumb alongside the likes of pop superstar Rihanna, acoustic fop James Blunt, emo pretty boys Panic! At The Disco, rapper Chris Brown and ex-Blink 182 man Tom Delonge's new project, Angels and Airwaves. But they shocked everyone, as their now-iconic video for *Bat Country* saw them take home the prize. "We are the underdogs! Peace!" said Synyster Gates, before dropping the mic and leaving the (frankly rather frightened-looking) audience wondering what they'd just witnessed. It was official: Avenged Sevenfold had crashed the mainstream.

Synyster is so proud of the amazing song his best friend wrote

A LITTLE PIECE OF HEAVEN RAISES THE BAR (2007)

2007's self-titled album saw A7X further accelerate away from the competition with broader, more streamlined and accessible material. But their creative spark was far from dimming, and the record's penultimate song was thrillingly experimental. Penned by The Rev and featuring contributions from former Oingo Boingo men Marc Mann and Steve Bartek, *A Little Piece of Heaven* is a masterpiece. Over eight sublime minutes, it takes us on a wild journey of gothic melodrama, orchestral bombast and gruesome lyrical content. Synyster told us: "I'm so thankful that we did it because to me, I feel like we have a song that stands the test of time and is one of the greatest songs ever written, like a *Bohemian Rhapsody* or a *Stairway To Heaven*. Even though I didn't write it, I'm probably even more proud that I got to witness that from a fan's perspective and it was my best friend that created it."

The Rev: taken far too soon

THE REV PASSES AWAY (2009)

On December 28, 2009, Jimmy was taken from us at the age of 28. The metal community was shocked and saddened when a statement was released on Avenged's website stating: "It is with great sadness and heavy hearts that we tell you of the passing today of Jimmy 'The Rev' Sullivan. Jimmy was not only one of the world's best drummers, but more importantly he was our best friend and brother." For a decade, Jimmy was the man who crafted Avenged Sevenfold's every move, each creative left turn instigated and driven by his restlessly creative mind. Tributes poured in from across the globe, from both fans and peers, and to this day our world mourns the loss of a truly unique character.

Download headliners: it had to happen

MIKE PORTNOY PLAYS ON *NIGHTMARE* (2010)

The loss of The Rev was crushing for Avenged Sevenfold, but they regrouped and paid tribute to their fallen brother as best they could with 2010's *Nightmare*. Work on the album had already begun before Jimmy's passing, and the final product features some of his demo and vocal takes, but someone was needed to step into the studio and recreate his unique drum style. Enter Mike Portnoy, then of Dream Theater, and with a reputation as one of the premier sticksmen in metal. He completed the sessions, before announcing he would be joining the band on their 2011 tour. "I am real excited to hit the road with the boys, to bring my drumming on their new album to life on stage and to honour the The Rev with all of their older material," he stated.

THEY HIT NO.1 ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC (2013)

Although its far more mid-paced and stompy hard rock textures weren't to everyone's taste, 2013's *Hail To The King* saw Avenged achieve yet another milestone. The record hit the top spot in the US Billboard charts while simultaneously giving them their first UK No.1 album, beating off competition from Bob Dylan and Franz Ferdinand, in a fantastic victory for metal. Zacky Vengeance told the Official Charts Company: "It has been a hell of a ride thus far and having our first No.1 album in the UK is a monumental achievement for our fans and us. Thank you for putting heavy metal back on the throne. We look forward to growing old with you."

Mike Portnoy: there when A7X needed him

DOWNLOAD FEST INVITES THEM TO HEADLINE (2014)

It had been five long years since Download had elevated a new artist to the peak position of the festival's main stage, with Slipknot in 2009. But with the success of *Hail To The King*, Avenged Sevenfold could no longer be ignored. A statement on the band's website read: "Friday, 13th June 2014 will mark a momentous occasion in the history of Avenged Sevenfold as we continue the tradition of spectacular Download performances by becoming headliners for the very first time, not just at Download, but at any UK festival." Their performance was lauded, and established them as legitimate festival closers across the globe – a position they maintain to this day.

THEY SURPRISE-RELEASE *THE STAGE* ALBUM (2016)

Blame Chris Jericho. It was the pro-wrestler, Fozzy frontman and huge metal fan who set tongues wagging when he posted the Deathbat logo and the (false) date 12/9/16 under it. Fans were already quizzical when, on October 3, the logo began randomly appearing in cities across the globe – it was projected onto buildings in London, Paris, Berlin and Toronto. But when Jericho stirred the pot even more the internet was nearly broken. What did it all mean? The mystery was revealed when *The Stage* was surprise-released at midnight on October 28, 2016, culminating in the band playing a special livestreamed set on top of the Capitol Records building, proving they still had the ability to shock their audience.

GETTY. PORTNOY/FUTURE

Zacky and Syn: BFFs with Hetfield and co

METALLICA TAKE THEM INTO STADIUMS (2017)

By this point in their career, Avenged had pretty much established themselves as their generation's version of Metallica. So, it was the perfect match when the biggest metal band of all time asked their spiritual successors to come out and be main support on their WorldWired stadium trek in 2017, in a mouthwatering package alongside Volbeat and Gojira. A situation that Synyster Gates called "humbling" and "completely inspiring" when we at *Hammer* caught up with the band in the middle of the tour.

THEY FIND THEIR *CALL OF DUTY* (2019)

Always thinking of new ways to introduce more people to their band, it made sense that A7X would want to get involved with one of the biggest gaming franchises on the planet. They have a few songs featured in *Call Of Duty* games (*Not Ready To Die* on *Black Ops*' *Call Of The Dead* expansion in 2010, *Carry On* in 2012's *Black Ops II*, *Jade Helm* in 2015's *Black Ops III*, *Mad Hatter* in 2018's *Black Ops 4*) but it was the addition of M. Shadows himself as a playable character in 2019's *Call Of Duty: Black Ops 4* that really showed how innovative and forward-thinking Avenged are. "It was such an honour, I'm a total gamer," Shadows beamed on their YouTube channel.

M. Shadows and Danny Trejo get played

Avenged Sevenfold: come on, lads... get it done!

ALBUM NUMBER EIGHT IS RELEASED (TBC)

Two decades into their career, a new Avenged Sevenfold album is a big deal in metal's event calendar, and we must be on the verge of getting one soon. At the start of the year, M. Shadows told *Kerrang!* magazine that the material for their eighth album was "over the top… eclectic and wild!" before playing down any rush to get it out while the world is in the midst of the pandemic. But, needless to say, we're desperate to hear where their wild, varied and fascinating career goes next.

GETTY. KAMERON POLLOCK/PRESS.

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France's metal maestros strike a universal chord

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: GABRIELLE DUPLANTIER

GOJIRA

Fortitude

ROADRUNNER

Bayonne's eco-metal missionaries click into a higher gear

GOJIRA DON'T PLAY death metal anymore. That's not an insult, it's a fact. They've always had lofty ambitions for four regular, eco-friendly blokes from the French countryside, and each record since 2001's initial burst, *Terra Incognita*, has hinted at something more. That evolution became impossible to ignore on 2012's *L'Enfant Sauvage* – it armed them with newfound rounds of melodic musical ammunition, pebble-dashing their influence on everyone from Architects to Conjurer. *Magma* arrived four years later, pushing the Sea Shepherd dinghy further. Singles like *Stranded* stomped with full-on, *Black Album* Metallica bullishness; this rubbed against much of the record's melancholy vastness, rooted in personal tragedy borne by lead songwriters and brothers, Joe and Mario Duplantier.

For album number seven, *Magma*'s experimentalism is channelled into what can only be described as The Fucking Hit Factory. Everything works immediately, even when it shouldn't. On paper, *Amazonia* comes off as Sepultura's *Roots* in a three-piece suit: boingy-woingy jaw harp, throat singing and woodwind all wrapped up by gap-year Gojira, *'The greatest miracle is burning to the ground'* serving an indictment of how we're destroying the planet. In a similar vein to Ancient Egypt hobbyists Nile, every chord, every note is meticulously carved to detail a textured world ripe for exploration; by the time the song's soaring leads finally pierce through, you're pretty much ready to tie yourself to a tree and get totalled by an American in a bulldozer. This isn't just music to bang your head to. This is Gojira's starkest, definitive protest song amidst a discography littered with them.

"A BREATHTAKING SHOWCASE OF HEAVINESS"

It's wholly transportive and hammers home that earthly, human quality they've always

PRESS/GABRIELLE DUPLANTIER

Gojira take their place in metal's upper echelons

managed to hide beneath the blastbeats. Their innate knack for pathos shines, whether that be on *Another World*'s plea for human beings to stop being massive shitbags, or *Into The Storm*'s show-stopping refrain. You don't even have to speak English for that to move you. So when *The Chant* arrives, all stacked harmonies and mid-tempo balladry, *Fortitude*'s unveiled enough depth for this to not just make sense, but stand out as one of its more striking moments. These aren't the actions of a band selling their souls or dumbing down. They've just fleshed out every aspect of their vision, and instead of bastardising *The Chant* by way of radio rock tune, they've twisted it into a kumbaya hold-my-hand anthem. They're recording by feel.

That's not to say Gojira scrimp on extremity, mind. *Grind* does what it says on the tin, piling pick-scrape upon pick-scrape; *Sphinx*'s verses harbour guttural, multi-tracked vocals you've not heard from Joe since *The Way Of All Flesh*. But it never relies on or fetishises the past, effortlessly counterbalancing said brutality with undeniable hooks and twin leads.

Fortitude is everything you wanted from Gojira and more: a breathtaking showcase of heaviness and dedication to the craft, teasing out tones, passages and emotional resonance other bands just can't access. It's metal for the masses, and Gojira's crowning achievement. If they aren't playing arenas at the end of this album cycle, it's probably your fault.

FOR FANS OF: Mastodon, Sepultura, Conjurer

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

AGELESS OBLIVION
Suspended Between Earth And Sky
APOCALYPTIC WITCHCRAFT

Hampshire's progressive death dealers come back from the grave

Little has been heard from Ageless Oblivion since 2014's *Penthos* – an album that seemed to promise a bright future for the Hampshire death squad. On the strength of their belated third album, it seems they've lost neither their brutality nor their progressive edge. This is a fierce offering whose relentlessness is balanced by a compositional intelligence and coherence many of the band's contemporaries could learn from. Tracks like *From Ash And Sulphur, All Was Froze* and *Cohesion* negotiate multiple gear shifts with deceptive elegance, while the closing epic, *Eldmessa*, reminiscent of Neurosis, earns every second of its 11-minute duration.

FOR FANS OF: Immolation, Morbid Angel, Tomb Mold

JOSEPH STANNARD

ALTARAGE
Succumb
SEASON OF MIST

The Basque hills are alive with the sound of black/death mayhem

Since their 2016 debut album, *Nihl*, Bilbao's Altarage have been holding straight flushes at the packed table where uncompromising black metal trades hands with dissonant death. This fourth full-length is their most challenging statement yet. Vaulting polyrhythms are hammered out like Hephaestus working up a forge-side sweat, while a frenetic deluge of riffs comes coated in its own ectoplasmic blancmange before being flung for a maxi-spin in an industrial-sized tumble-dryer. All this serves as one almighty preamble to the monolithic bludgeon of *Devorador De Mundos* – a 21-minute-plus doom-laden trawl through the belly of the titular world eater where planetary digestion is eternal and the post-meal exhaust bellows like a hurricane.

FOR FANS OF: Portal, Abyssal, Artificial Brain

SPENCER GRADY

BALA
Maleza
CENTURY MEDIA

Spanish duo ratchet up the stop-start groove machine

Stoner rock's always sat in a particular pocket, right next to the grinder. This Galician two-piece bake a few grams of that scene's fuzzed-up tone into their third album: a taut, 24-minute exercise in percussive groove and grit. Think COC's Southern-fried guitars filtered through a woozy alt-rock filter to begin with – then you've got stuff like *X*, which flits from 90s grunge melodies to heads-down, staccato hardcore quicker than losing your phone in the pit. Anxela Baltar's shrivelled-up screams lead the charge as she fills up her riff quota, and as if drummer Violeta Mosquera fears being sidelined, *Una Selva*'s intro sprints along with an unnecessary, but much appreciated, flurry of fills. Bala are onto something.

FOR FANS OF: Mantar, Pissed Jeans, Barren Womb

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

Big | Brave: stark and mysterious

BIG | BRAVE

Vital

SOUTHERN LORD

Montreal's majestic post-metallers go deeper into their crystal maze

BIG | BRAVE HAVE carved a strange and singular career since 2012, and *Vital* doesn't see them waver an inch from their solemn trajectory. Like an iceberg alone and utterly adrift, the Montreal trio are less a rock band than a slow, steady, inexorable force of nature that's unforgiving but also undeniably beautiful. They occupy a space that's not quite doom, drone, noise- or post-rock, yet it's one that's capable of satisfying the more discerning fans of any of those subgenres.

The band carefully hew a series of vast, impossible structures that only seem to make sense when viewed from a great distance. Riffs rise up like huge opalescent towers through which Robin Wattie's achingly beautiful voice echoes – equal parts otherworldly yodel and harrowingly cathartic ululation. Drawing comparisons with everyone from Sunn O))) and Bardo Pond to Come and Blonde Redhead, their maximal approach to minimalism is often bewildering, like being lost in a maze of crystals. *Half Breed*, for example, pulls itself up from the ground with a series of rumbles, crumples, creaks and whines, but moves beyond abstraction and forces itself into a gloriously unsteady lope.

Elsewhere, *Of This Ilk* demonstrates the kind of huge, rhythmic yaw that should satisfy the most Cro-Magnon of riff-seekers, while the title track's closing squalls are nothing short of obliterative. The band's ability to balance heaviness with fragility speaks to their craft and depth, and it's fitting that such a deft collective hand should also be picking through themes as complex and nuanced as race, gender and selfhood. Always beautiful and always frighteningly majestic, *Vital* is instantly accessible and yet incredibly difficult to fully unlock. Another powerful statement from one of the most enigmatic and distinctive entities operating at heavy music's wildest and most exciting fringes.

FOR FANS OF: **Anna von Hausswolff, Sunn O))), Divide And Dissolve**

ALEX DELLER

BENTHOS

II

ECLIPSE

Italian math metallers stick too close to the source code

There's an expectation that you'll wear your influences on your sleeves on your debut. Despite its title implying a sophomore effort, *II* adheres to that preconception, sifting through contemporary prog to cherry-pick its best bits. Benthos specialise in tech metal chops whirring beneath soaring clean vocals, their mix of melody and math comparable to Caligula's Horse and Tesseract. The occasional destructive, growling breakdowns channel Meshuggah and even the artwork feels Coheed And Cambria-ish. It's derivative, yet the sheer talent and vocal grace on display makes these Italians inherently likeable. Given more time to find a unique sound, they could become scene heavy hitters.

FOR FANS OF: **Haken, Tesseract, Hypno5e**

MATT MILLS

BODY VOID

Bury Me Beneath This Rotting Earth

PROSTHETIC

Sludge-laden nihilism from the Californian wastelands

Body Void's third album is their most dynamic and visceral yet. The pair still mostly operate at glacial tempos, making the sporadic bursts of speed all the more thrilling by contrast. *Fawn*'s desolate, punishing dirge abruptly breaks into a storming d-beat knees-up, only to come crashing back down with subtle embellishments from touring bassist Entresol. *Laying Down In A Forest Fire* is even more atmospheric, the sparse, pounding bass and tense, reverb-laden sheets of tremolo achieving a claustrophobic, chest-caving feel to *Pale Man*. Yet BV retain their own identity throughout, with their crustier guitar tone and Willow Ryan's distinctive high-pitched shriek. Top-tier sludge.

FOR FANS OF: **Primitive Man, Indian, Vile Creature**

KEZ WHELAN

CALIBAN

Zeitgeister

CENTURY MEDIA

Germany's metalcore veterans go back to die Zukunft

Inspired by their 2010 cover of Rammstein's *Sonne*, Caliban have taken choice cuts from their vast catalogue and rerecorded them in their German mother tongue. It might seem a simple switch, but the effect is significant; each track has a new meaning and, in many cases, a revitalised impact. *Tyranny Of Small Misery*, for example, is now *Ausbruch Nach Innen* and, whilst close to the original in structure, sounds even more ferocious than before. A guest spot from Nasty's Matthi Tarnath on *Trauma* (ex-*Arena Of Concealment*) works gangbusters and new track *nICHts* is a hefty slab of breakdowns and expansive backing synths. As experiments go, this one is a rousing success.

FOR FANS OF: **Architects, Heaven Shall Burn, Darkest Hour**

ELLIOT LEAVER

CROWN
The End Of All Things
PELAGIC

Industrial Gauls find rich pastures beyond the metal gate

As a post-metal duo, an identity crisis plagued Crown. The bubbling synths of their calmest moments evoked NIN, their titanic climaxes were more akin to Cult Of Luna, and there was little to unite those soundscapes. Happily, their third album eschews jarring breakdowns in favour of diversifying their industrial side. Although pre-existing loyalists may scoff, the result feels not only cohesive, but expansive. *The End Of All Things* unfolds as it progresses, creeping to life with the pensive yet accessible *Violence* and *Neverland* – plodding rockers that brim with electronic delicacy. Crown also immerse themselves in synthwave, spoken-word and acoustic textures, all bound and interwoven by a slow, keys-driven dread. They may not make metal anymore, but in the process they've opened up new possibilities for genre transcendence that could sustain them for an entire career.

FOR FANS OF: Blitz//Berlin, Nine Inch Nails, Killing Joke

MATT MILLS

ALEXANDRU MOGA/PRESS

DOMKRAFT
Seeds
MAGNETIC EYE

Sweden's psychedelic doom crew return to blow minds and amps

Since their 2016 debut, *The End Of Electricity*, Stockholm's Domkraft have carved their own distinctive niche within the well-worn confines of doom. Martin Wegeland's anguished vocals are one of the band's unique selling points; the frontman sounds genuinely tormented, which lends much to the overall atmosphere of hypnotic despond that pervades their third album. That's not to overlook the viscous riffing of guitarist Martin Widholm and the measured pounding of drummer Anders Dahlgren, which fuse with Wegeland's despairing wail to construct a formidable, psychedelic wall. Thanks to the expert mix-work of Karl Daniel Liden – who's also lent his considerable skills to Greenleaf, Katatonia and Lowrider – there's a tactility and thickness to the sound here that, even at low volume, has the listener wallowing ecstatically in a textured slurry of cosmic sludge.

FOR FANS OF: Yob, Sons Of Otis, Spelljammer

JOSEPH STANNARD

DVNE
Etemen Ænka
METAL BLADE

Sublime post-metal splendour from highest peaks of Scotland

There's been precious little in the way of hype for this Scottish quintet, which is why *Etemen Ænka* is such a delightful surprise. Seemingly from nowhere, Dvne have struck gold with their second album – a sprawling, emotional and superbly dynamically vast set of songs that work both individually as riffy progressive metal bangers and, even more so, as part of a breathtaking whole. To hear a metal band lean in hard on the synapse-breaking power of Isis's post-metal before launching skyward to ape the spine-tingling euphoria of Pink Floyd's *The Great Gig In The Sky*, as on *Omega Severer*, is a jaw-dropping moment. But it's one of many moments of brilliance on what is surely going to be one of the very best metal albums of any description in 2021.

FOR FANS OF: Isis, Mastodon, Deftones

STEPHEN HILL

ENDSEEKER
Mount Carcass
METAL BLADE

Teutonic enthusiasts crack the Swedeath code

With bands from France, Italy, Chile and even Indonesia aping a sound that was born in a cold Stockholm basement back in 1989, the Swedeath revival has turned into a circus. Thankfully, bands like Endseeker are keeping their collective wits about them. Like their fellow countrymen Revel In Flesh, these Germans know how to tread the thin line separating tradition from expansion. Their third full-length never lets its overabundance of greasy HM-2 pedals numb its intensity, especially in its heavier moments, such as *Bloodline*. Armed with a singer who enunciates each syllable with gutso, Endseeker never under-estimate the value of a catchy chorus and know when to pull out a simple, catchy melodic hook – even when they cover John Carpenter's *Escape From New York*'s main theme. Endseeker are traditional, but for all the good reasons.

FOR FANS OF: Desultory, Edge Of Sanity, Fatalist

OLIVIER BADIN

Dordeduh engage in some blue sky thinking

DORDEDUH
Har
LUPUS LOUNGE

Epoch-mashing brilliance from Romania's polymetal masters

THERE IS PLENTY of quick-fix heavy music out there, but if you're hoping for transcendence, awe and worlds within worlds, Dordeduh's second album already has your number. It was fairly obvious from 2012's mesmerising *Dar De Duh* debut that Sol Faur and Hupogrammos had departed Negură Bunget with their own esoteric musical aspirations intact, but *Har* is a bold leap forward by anyone's standards.

Where their previous band often revelled in a haze of mystique, Dordeduh sounded strident and forceful on their debut. They also had wild ideas by the ton and the tunes to back them up. Nine years later, their vision has expanded, matured and taken on a sense of polished majesty, aided in no small part by the meticulous hand of studio guru Jens Bogren. The Romanians are still instinctively sworn to the black, of course, and a robust core remains, but Dordeduh have mastered many disciplines and have woven them all into their second full-length, with results that are vivid, rich with sonic colour and endlessly fascinating.

Opener *Timpul Întâilor* is a mindblowing spectacle all by itself. Twelve minutes of exploratory but muscular, dark and grandiose metal, it reeks of imperious self-belief and supreme confidence. *Descânt*, with its sense of glacial, post-rock drift, churning, nails-hard riffs and beatific, trippy melodies, is equally stunning, while towering epic *Vraci De Nord* combines syrupy, Om-like psych with bursts of brutish, blackened pomp and icy, goth-tinged shoegaze to hypnotic and weirdly uplifting effect. *Har* reaches a peak of inspirational brilliance on the 11-minute *De Neam Vergur*, wherein space rock synths and Morricone reverb collide with a syncopated prog metal shuffle. Dordeduh seem to shape-shift in real time, exhibiting refined melodic sensibilities and sounding irrefutably like one of the most creative and original metal bands on the planet. Which, on this evidence, is exactly what they are.

FOR FANS OF: Rotting Christ, Enslaved, Gojira

DOM LAWSON

Evile take a few more leaves out of the thrash playbook

EVILE
Hell Unleashed
NAPALM

UK thrash revivalists return to the drawing board

BLIGHTED BY TRAGEDY and misfortune, Huddersfield thrashers Evile have always faced an uphill battle to maintain their position as the great bright hope of Britain's thrash revival. 2007's *Enter The Grave* was a lightning rod for puritanical thrash, while subsequent releases saw the band expand their melodious inclinations, adopting tropes from across the Big 4 pantheon and achieving spots on the US Heat Top 100 charts in the process.

But progress be damned, Evile have marched right back to the fury of their debut for *Hell Unleashed*, their first release in eight years. Less a comeback than a soft reboot, long-time guitarist Ol Drake has taken up vocal duties following the departure of his brother Matt last year, also bringing in Riptide's Adam Smith on rhythm guitar. Unconcerned with the shades of hardcore and black metal that have crept back into the scene this past decade, the revived band instead put meat'n'potatoes thrash through its paces by way of dynamic songwriting and hellish atmospherics, swinging a pendulum between 250mph speed-freak carnage and ominous, half-time stomps.

On paper, this lack of novelty could leave Evile sifting through the dust trails left by their idols, but it's in the execution that they truly excel. Even at its most derivative – *Incarcerated* comes off like a *Seasons In The Abyss* supercut, complete with slow-burn intro and spoken-word elements – the band are able to repurpose thrash's best elements to make them feel thrilling and fresh. While it remains to be seen how much the band will experiment going forward, *Hell Unleashed* has plenty of lightning-charged (over)doses of adrenaline in the form of songs like *War Of Attrition*, *Disorder* and the title track to blast away the cobwebs and remind everyone why they took notice in the first place.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Eradikator, Xentrix

RICH HOBSON

MARTY FRIEDMAN
Tokyo Jukebox 3
THE PLAYERS CLUB/MASCOT LABEL GROUP

Former Megadeth axeman reignites his love of J-pop

Marty Freidman's career has been marked by a reluctance to do the same thing for too long. After a decade as Megadeth's lead axeman, the shredder moved to Japan, embracing the music and culture of his new home. This third volume of reworkings of J-Pop tunes from Momoiro Clover Z, Sekai No Owari and DA Pump is all-instrumental save for a cameo from singer Alfakyun on *The Perfect World*. But no matter – it's a reminder us that few artists can make a guitar sing like Friedman. Vacuous pop this is not. There's an intensity to his rendition of *Grunge*, the theme from Netflix's *Demon Slayer* that really gets the blood pumping.

FOR FANS OF: Joe Satriani, Steve Vai, John Petrucci

DAVE LING

GHOST IRIS
Comatose
LONG BRANCH

Progressive metalcore crew blend brawn with beauty

The fourth album from this Danish progressive metalcore quartet continues to explore their more visceral side, and it's their most immediate offering to date. The dissonant squall of the instrumental opener works as a juddering launch pad for lead single *Desert Dread*'s wall of pulverising riffs. Shifting between a rattling barrage of harsh gutturals to propulsive grooves and fret-blazing dexterity, it refuses to be contained. The searing cleans in *Ebb// Flow* and *Coma* sees Ghost Iris at their hookiest, while elsewhere layers of melancholic atmosphere help map out the band's depth of vision. *Comatose* balances acerbic heaviness and tech-inflected ambience with consummate ease.

FOR FANS OF: Kadinja, Architects, Novelists FR

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

GHOSTS OF ATLANTIS
3.6.2.4
BLACK LION

Symphonic death metal collective make a grand opening overture

It took Septicflesh nine albums to reach the standard of *Communion*. By comparison, Ghosts Of Atlantis have come straight out the turnstiles with their debut album, bulging with dense, cinematic symphonies. Yet their big-budget bombast isn't by luck but experience. Featuring Colin Parks from Dani Filth's horror sideshow, Devilment, and with a sturdy bedrock of other seasoned members, the Suffolk newcomers are a band of serious talent who steadfastly refuse to budge from maximum-impact melodrama at every turn. From the first strains of the colossal *The Third Pillar*, this mythically inspired record brims with deathly symphonic assaults and epic choruses to rival Dimmu Borgir's best singalong moments. *3.6.2.4 is* a rollercoaster ride of brutal extravagance.

FOR FANS OF: Septicflesh, Fleshgod Apocalypse, Dimmu Borgir

HOLLY WRIGHT

HIRAKI
Stumbling Through The Walls
NEFARIOUS INDUSTRIES

Denmark's post-punk nihilists put their own spin on the apocalypse

There are moments on Hiraki's second full-length where you'd swear you'd stumbled upon a long-lost post-punk album from the 80s. The apocalyptic and industrialised throb of Killing Joke, early Swans or even Christian Death is so prevalent on *Mirror Stalker* that it's hard to ignore. But modern artists have been successfully mining this well for a few years now, and Uniform's hardcore update springs to mind when you hear a song like *Wonderhunt*. What sets Hiraki apart are their more quietly unsettling moments, such as when Rikke Fink adds her whispered vocals to the experimental, sci-fi nightmare of album highlight, *New Standards*. Being influenced by the past to such an extent is really no problem when you put such a fascinating spin on it as Hiraki have done here.

FOR FANS OF: Uniform, Daughters, Jesu

STEPHEN HILL

INFERNO
Paradeigma (Phosphenes Of Aphotic Eternity)
DEBEMUR MORTI PRODUCTIONS

Atmospheric Czech black metallers hit an ecstatic motherlode

If Inferno's quest for spiritual reckoning has the air of an Akhlys-like solo project, it's surprising to discover that 18 members have passed through their ranks over the last 25 years. Maybe they all fell Icarus-like before they reached their destined psychic summit, or failed to meet sole permanent member Adramelech's exacting standards. Either way, the current five-piece sound like a rebirth, casting off more vestiges of rock'n'roll, and mortal concerns, as they spiral and occasionally linger through atmospheric realms towards a transformative critical mass. *Paradeigma* is abyssal, but exalted too. For all its arcane, cosmological mysticism there's an anticipatory, multi-layered euphoria brewed up by the likes of *The Wailing Horizon* and *Ekstasis Of The Continuum*, the latter's tantric, post-punk shudders an offering amidst an echo chamber of otherworldly wails. Inferno are on the cusp of something special.

FOR FANS OF: Schammash, Blut Aus Nord, Akhlys

JONATHAN SELZER

JESS AND THE ANCIENT ONES
Vertigo
SVART

Finland's occult psych rockers cast a dazzling, dizzy spell

The fourth LP from these leading lights of last decade's occult rock revival is aptly named. It's not only a homage to the legendary 70s swirl label that provided some of the record's most crucial touchstones – the weighty darkness of Black Sabbath, the kinetic boogie of Status Quo, the Hammond-driven dramatics of Uriah Heep – but also as a neat allusion for the woozy, unbalanced nature of their supernatural jams. Even so, this Finnish troupe never cross the line into hippy-dippy self-indulgence. Tempos are sprightly and exuberant – except for some bluesy doom in epic closer *Strange Earth Illusion* – while their structures get ever sharper. Marauding earworms like *Talking Board*, *Born To Kill* and *World Paranormal* prove that Jess and co remain some of the savviest operators in this lurid realm.

FOR FANS OF: Coven, Graveyard, Ghost

CHRIS CHANTLER

LUCIFUGE
Infernal Power
DYING VICTIMS

German barbarians get their black/thrash punk credentials in order

The problem with the short-lived black/thrash movement of the 90s was its inability to go beyond their original urge to merely play early Bathory and *Pleasure To Kill* covers in disguise. Bremen's Lucifuge avoid that pitfall by tapping directly into the original source, and they genuinely sound like punks playing metal and not the other way around. Actually, their fourth album's sole missteps are when they fall back in line and forego their mohawks to switch into full-on black metal mode; they're at their best when they sound like a lost Neat Records artefact from 1981 fronted by an extremely pissed-off version of Cronos. Behind the brilliantly barbaric Paolo Girardi artwork you can almost smell the vintage Gibson SG fumes on *Black Batallions* and its very Maiden-esque dual harmonies. So Midnight, watch your back!

FOR FANS OF: Midnight, Warfare, Aura Noir

OLIVIER BADIN

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

BONGZILLA/TONS
Doom Sessions Vol. 4
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

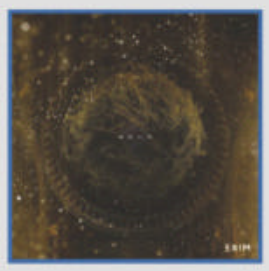
Bongzilla have slipped right back into their old groove, especially on nine-minute riff-fest *Mother Flowers Little Helper*. Italy's Tons add a more textured, psychedelic flavour, complementing their rawer sound nicely.

KEZ WHELAN

ELECTROMANCY
Robot Black Metal
SELF-RELEASED

Transilvanian Hunger played by robots? Svre. Sole organic member Satyra built said machines to create music while stricken with Lyme disease It's a fascinating concept with the compositional chops to deliver.

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH



EXIST IMMORTAL
Act Two - Gold
SEEK AND STRIKE

Following on from last year's *Act One – Rebirth*, *Gold* is the second instalment in a three-EP trilogy. It finds these melodic tech metallers in their emotive sweet spot, exploiting their knack for a hook to the full.

DANNII LEIVERS

FORSMÁN
Dönsum i Logans Ljóma
VÁN

These Icelanders' debut mini-album strikes an unholy balance between vehement BM rancour and Behemoth-like opulence. The torrents of chasmic tremolo-picking and bestial grimness hint at less generic future glories.

SPENCER GRADY

MONASTERIES
Silence
SEEK AND STRIKE

Five slabs of utterly destructive, elephant-heavy, electronic glitch-filled tech deathcore from the Manchester brutes. It isn't reinventing the wheel, but *Silence* is as subtle as a jumbo jet up the sphincter, and twice as painful.

STEPHEN HILL

NORDJEVEL
Fenriir EP
INDIE RECORDINGS

If being overrun by an army of barbed wire barbarians is your idea of fun, Nordjevel have you covered. *Fenriir* is classic black metal with an agile mastery of tempo and mace-wielded melody, plus a killer cover of Possessed's *Fallen Angel* to boot.

JONATHAN SELZER

Grave Miasma have a hunch their gods are more powerful than yours

GRAVE MIASMA

Abyss Of Wrathful Deities

SEPULCHRAL VOICE

London's arcane death metallers reach a new plane of potency

ALTHOUGH TOO ARCANE and turbulent to be picked up by the mainstream radar, Grave Miasma are regarded as contemporary gods by discerning death metal connoisseurs. After two acclaimed EPs, the Londoners' debut album, *Odori Sepulcrorum*, was a devastating, imperious statement, wherein the malevolent spirit and atmosphere of the old school were given a monstrous upgrade, incorporating decades of leftfield, dissonant brutality into an otherwise strident act of genre purity. Somehow, 2016's *Endless Pilgrimage* EP was even more impressive, as the band's sound became more focused, and its delivery more destructive. As a result, a huge amount is expected of second album, *Abyss Of Wrathful Deities*. Pleasingly, it delivers on each and every front.

There is something truly magical about Grave Miasma's sound. Firmly rooted in the darkest corners of death metal's first and second waves, songs like barbarous opener *Guardians Of Death* and the warped and progressive *Rogyapa* are masterful exercises in undiluted riffing power and multi-tempo dexterity, but underpinned by a palpable sense of otherworldly menace and mortal dread. It's the ultimate holistic death metal experience and it's insanely exciting.

Significantly, by eschewing the foggy pretention of the post-Portal set in favour of a muscular and precise production job, Grave Miasma have given these incredible songs their best chance of connecting with the audience they deserve. As much as songs like *Erudite Decomposition* and *Exhumation Rites* wallow in atonal churn, they are also beautifully constructed, old-school metal songs, with all the incisive riff power and grandeur the greatest of such endeavours require.

Avowedly dark as fuck and endlessly fascinating, and yet still dedicated to making heads bang, *Abyss Of Wrathful Deities* is further proof that Grave Miasma are operating on a higher level than just about everybody else.

FOR FANS OF: Incantation, Cruciamentum, Necros Christos

DOM LAWSON

MISTER MISERY

A Brighter Side Of Death

ARISING EMPIRE

Scandic horror metallers prove not so grave

You can hear the influence of Motionless In White and Ice Nine Kills bleeding through these Swedish ghouls' sophomore album. Mister Misery may be working to a well-trodden formula, but the heightened aggression they've dialled up this time around prevents it from being a carbon copy of 2019's *Unalive*. Synth-drenched salvos and twisted howls collide on goth-stompers *Ballad Of The Headless Horseman* and *Buried*, offering up plentiful creature-inspired comforts, while the high-octane riffs of *I'll Never Be Yours* inject a scuzzy sleaze-rock attitude and ramp up the chantable choruses. If you're hungry for vaudeville, *A Brighter Side Of Death* provides enough entertainment for you to sink your teeth into.

FOR FANS OF: Motionless In White, Ice Nine Kills, Miss May I

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

MOTHER OF ALL

Age Of The Solipsist

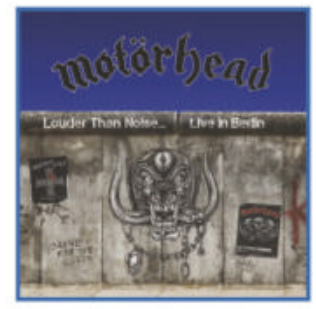
BLACK LION

Myrkur's live drummer fills out his melodic death wish list

While playing drums for Myrkur, Martin Haumann has kept himself occupied with Mother Of All. After some promising EPs, *Age Of The Solipsist* arrives with the unmistakable bass rumblings of Testament and ex-Death maestro Steve DiGiorgio alongside guitarist Frederik Jensen. Though only 29 minutes long, the album covers a lot of ground, with each track adopting its own identity and style, from proggy flourishes to techy and thrashy sprints. *Curators Of Our World Scope* and *At The Edge Of A Dream*'s fiendish twists give the opportunity to scratch a Schuldiner itch, and the title track allows Jensen's leads to soar, before the melodeath histrionics of *Feel The Pain* ends proceedings on a high.

FOR FANS OF: Soilwork, Skeletonwitch, Death

ADAM REES



MOTÖRHEAD

Louder Than Noise... Live In Berlin

SILVER LINING MUSIC

Metal legends remembered in world-beating form

Six years on from Lemmy's passing, the public retains its appetite for 'Head-endorsed booze, action figures and boxed sets. This live album/DVD comes from Berlin's 12,000-capacity Velodrom during a tour for 2010's *The Wörld Is Yours*. In contrast to 2015's *Clean Your Clock*, which understandably chronicled a band on its last legs, *Louder Than Noise...* is a healthier-sounding and still-ferocious distillation of Motörhead's millennial outlaw essence. With just *I Know How To Die* pulled from their then-current record and *String Theory* being a Phil Campbell guitar solo, its 15 songs span a catalogue to die for, ending as usual with an ear-splitting *Overkill*. *This* is how to remember them.

FOR FANS OF: Metallica, Bullet, Tank

DAVE LING

JACK LATIMER/PRESS

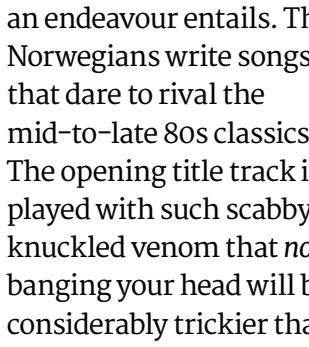
NEKROMANTHEON
The Visions Of Trismegistos
INDIE RECORDINGS

Dark thrash savagery with no backflips or smiling

At one end of the thrash spectrum, people chug beer and do backflips off the furniture. At the other, bands like Nekromantheon explosively salute the imminent arrival of the endtimes, with all the brutality, dissonance and old-school purity that such an endeavour entails. The Norwegians write songs that dare to rival the mid-to-late 80s classics. The opening title track is played with such scabby-knuckled venom that *not* banging your head will be considerably trickier than usual. *Seven Rulers Of Hate* is even faster and more furious, with dizzying tempo changes and an escalating sense of impending violence. *Neptune Descent* is a dense blur of clattering sci-fi brutality and devilish hooks. In fact, every one of this album's 33 minutes will take your face off – no party invite required.

FOR FANS OF: Slayer, Possessed, Deathhammer

DOM LAWSON



NIHT
Arcanum
VÁN

Bavarian black metallers mix some catchiness into their kvlt

Hailing from the Bavarian city of Memmingen, Niht return with their second outing – a sharp and wholly compelling collection of modern black metal. Well-versed in the classics, on tracks like *Angst* and *Hass* they channel grim echoes of Darkthrone and Mayhem. *Arcanum* is anything but a rote tribute, however. Blinding tempos and hyperspeed guitar breaks reach feverish intensity as death and blackened vocals converge into a howling abyss. Buried somewhere beneath the leafy decomposition of their blackened sound is a classic rock pedigree that plays out in melodic fretwork that's downright catchy. But fear not; bleakness and brutality lurk behind every note and tracks like *Lüge* and *Wahn* deliver an unholy siege of pure exhilaration. Brimming with swagger and hostility, *Arcanum* delivers the goods.

FOR FANS OF: Tribulation, Carpathian Forest, Akhyls

JOE DALY

NINKHARSAG
The Dread March Of Solemn Gods
VENDETTA

British black metallers combine grimness and outright glee

'Exuberant' might seem an ill-fitting adjective for black metal, but as Ninkharsag's second album launches into opener *Night Wrath*, it's hard to think of a term more appropriate for the glee with which these Liverpudlians execute their savagery. A dual guitar attack is the focus – a by turns icy, brutal and melodic sonic wall that abounds through spirited assault after spirited assault. The excoriating vocals, repugnant blasts and headbanging righteousness of *The Necromanteion*, followed by the thrashing mania of *Discipline Through Black Sorcery*, combine in particular to form a killer one-two punch. Ninkharsag's songs of Satan are executed with such fervency you can't help but have as much fun listening as they clearly did recording.

FOR FANS OF: Urgehal, The Black Dahlia Murder, 1349

TOM O'BOYLE

NOÊTA
Elm
PROPHECY PRODUCTIONS

Bleak, spectral wonder from the dark heart of Scandinavia

Dark ambient minimalists Noêta are a collaboration between Norwegian vocalist/musician Êlea and Swedish multi-instrumentalist Ândris. A haunting, sombrely emotive affair, *Elm* is named after, and emotionally bound to poet Sylvia Plath's expression of unrequited love, a work passed into legend as her final piece of writing before her tragic suicide. The delicately finger-picked acoustic guitar of *Dawn Falls* is a solitary accompaniment to Êlea's ethereal vocals, before the instrumentation of *As I Fall Silent* gradually broadens with strings and menacing distortion looming in the background. Foreboding synth introduces the mournful strings of *Above And Below* as Êlea's vocal range reach the higher echelons. The record closes with *Elm* and *Elm II*, their funereal aura and whispered urgency bleeding into abstraction, as spacey echoes and doom-ridden portent close out a personal and introspective journey.

FOR FANS OF: Emma Ruth Rundle, Anna von Hausswolf, Chelsea Wolfe

TOM O'BOYLE

Myles Kennedy finds his comfort zone

MYLES KENNEDY
The Ides Of March
NAPALM

Alter Bridge's unassailable vocalist wrings the sublime from the insipid

BE IT IN ALTER Bridge, his work with Slash or now as a bone fide solo artist in his own right, Myles Kennedy has proven himself to be one of the most technically proficient vocalists in modern rock. Whether in 2021 you consider the incredibly earnest and classic-sounding hard rock that he specialises in the most exciting thing in the world is another debate entirely, but, taking it purely for what it pertains to be, the follow-up to 2018's debut solo album, *Year Of The Tiger*, is more evidence that Myles is objectively masterful at his chosen craft.

You may well have heard the Southern-fried, country slide guitar that opens a song like *In Stride* myriad times over the years, but as soon as Myles's honey-coated, burnt-oak tenor massages itself into your ears, your head will be nodding along. In fact, so classy a vocalist is Mr Kennedy, you do have to wonder exactly what these songs would sound like with the larynx of another artist. Musically speaking, *Wake Me When It's Over* is dull and middling enough to fit snuggly on a recent Foo Fighters album, yet that soaring voice on the chorus utterly redeems it and turns it into something approaching a banger. Not even Myles's best efforts can save the bloated Led Zep-isms of the title track, though – more a stairway to purgatory than heaven.

The Ides Of March is certainly a mixed bag, far more successful when aiming musically for a grizzled ZZ Top with a world-class vocalist front and centre than it is when aiming for stadiums. But, for already existing fans, you suspect, as long as Myles Kennedy is there flexing his pipes that'll be sufficient. Which is fair enough. Not many can do it like he can.

FOR FANS OF: ZZ Top, Bon Jovi, Black Stone Cherry

STEPHEN HILL

CHUCK BRUECKMANN/PRESS

Paysage D'Hiver: black metal's Bigfoot strikes again

PAYSAGE D'HIVER
Geister
KUNSTHALL PRODUKTIONEN

Switzerland's revered black metaller comes back quickly from the cold

CONSIDERING IT TOOK 23 years and numerous demo and split releases before Swiss mastermind Wintherr released the first Paysage D'Hiver album proper, it's a pleasant surprise to see album number two arriving just over a year afterwards. At a solid 70 minutes, *Geister* is still epic in scope, but feels noticeably trimmer than 2020's sprawling *Im Wald*. There's much less focus on ambience this time – with the exception of chilling 10-minute outro, *Geischtr*, of course – and significantly more abrasive, fiery riffing. Tracks like *Bluet* and the brutish, almost Gorgoroth-like *Wüetig* maintain a pounding, authoritative stomp. The album's immersive wall of sound doesn't really let up until its very final moments, bristling with a more ferocious, caustic energy than the previous album's more introspective, forlorn tone.

In fact, if Wintherr wasn't so notoriously reclusive, it'd be tempting to think of this album as a direct response to some of *Im Wald*'s more vocal critics; anyone who thought that record was too long and dream-like for its own good now has a much leaner, more focused and riffy record to contend with. That's not to say *Geister* is a complete departure, however. The production is very similar to *Im Wald*, keeping that murky lo-fi aesthetic whilst still being crystal clear and powerful sounding, and the hypnotic, ethereal quality of Wintherr's songwriting is still undeniable. The seething, blizzard-like assault of tracks like *Äschä* feel much more direct and streamlined here too, compacting his usual expansive soundscapes into more confrontational yet digestible chunks.

Geister doesn't feel as grandiose or definitive a statement as its predecessor did, but it doesn't really need to. As a more aggressive, compact follow-up, it works perfectly, and is a reassuring reminder that Wintherr didn't come anywhere near to exhausting his riff vault with that two-hour opus.

FOR FANS OF: Urfaust, Xasthur, Darkspace

KEZ WHELAN

NORDGEIST
Frostwinter
KUNSTHALL

Siberian black metaller fails to colour in her canvas

The Siberian metaller known as T arrives with her ambitious debut: a four-track mini-symphony that pays heavy homage to the black metal of Scandinavia's frozen north. Moody atmospherics dominate the compositions like a vaporous, remote presence, while blastbeats rage, riffs run through like buzzsaws and tortured vocal shrieks pierce the soundscapes. With tracks averaging over 12 minutes, there's ample room for experimentation, but each one generally hews to a single idea teased out ever-so-slightly into four sprawling epics. As such, the material lacks sonic contrast and emotional engagement, instead taking on a generic quality that inexorably pushes the music into the mental background.

FOR FANS OF: Hermóðr, Ellende, Totalselfhatred

JOE DALY

OSIAH
Loss
UNIQUE LEADER

Sunderland's deathcore brutes precision-tool their malice

Twenty years since it first came windmilling out of the underground, deathcore done right still has a satisfying ability to kick you right in the sweet spot. Sunderland's Osiah have proved to be masters of the craft, and *Loss* again hits the belligerent bullseye. The frantic velocity and oppressive atmosphere of *Queen Of Sorrow* and *Ominous Mind* focus on death metal's broader boundaries, yet when the breakdowns do come they're delivered with the force and precision of a ballistic missile. Ingested's Jason Evans joins Ricky Lee Roper's demonic gurgling on the eerie harmonies of the title track, further underlining the rude health of British death metal.

FOR FANS OF: Ingested, Thy Art Is Murder, Enterprise Earth

ADAM REES

SKARLETT RIOT
Invicta
DESPOTZ

Scunthorpe's modern metallers blend potency and polish

Invicta sees Skarlett Riot honing their darkly anthemic craft, melding modern metalcore and hard rock. Skarlett's soaring choruses and clean-cum-harsh vocals collide on *Gravity* and *Stronger*, giving these earworms radio-friendly polish, while elsewhere more introspective forays highlight the band's songwriting nous with thought-provoking layers and crescendos to get lost in. Some tracks are less memorable than others, but *Black Cloud* showcases the mix of raw aggression and emotive soundscapes that make the band shine. The production hits the right balance between gritty and polished, and Skarlett Riot's combination of clenched teeth attitude and dynamic energy is a potent force.

FOR FANS OF: Asking Alexandria, Bullet For My Valentine, New Years Day

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

WORLD SERVICE
Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

CHOVU
What Sorcery Is This? EP
OBSYDIAN MEDIA

Kenya's Chovu use black metal's sonic terror to explore African mythology on a four-track EP that tells the story of the sorceress Mwikali with a rough-hewn, exploratory mixture of melody and brutality.

TOM O'BOYLE

ILDARUNI
Beyond Unseen Gateways
BLACK LION

This Armenian crew's bombastic take on polished pagan metal is eminently classy and full of insidious, folksy hooks. There's a cinematic edge to *Towards Subterranean Realms*, along with bags of potential.

DOM LAWSON

TURBULENCE
Frontal
FRONTIERS

Turbulence reveal a metal-friendly style of prog on their second album. *Frontal* is a deeply melodic statement, and the Lebanese quartet's ability to shift moods marks them out for the future.

DAVE LING

HANNES BAR/PRESS

SPECTRAL WOUND
A Diabolic Thirst
PROFOUND LORE

Necrotic Canadians feast at the altar of 90s Norway

From the *Transilvanian Hunger*-like cover to the frenzied, unrelenting nature, everything about Spectral Wound screams '90s Norway!' – until you learn that they're from 21st-century Montreal. There isn't much originality going on across the six, short and savage attacks on their third album, but they're executed with such aplomb it's impossible not to get swept along in the icy tirade. *Imperial Saison Noire*'s walls of relentlessly cold tremolo picking culminate in a righteous solo. *Frigid And Spellbound* is apocalyptic in portent and magnitude, with hooks like scythes. *Mausoleal Drift* provides a mid-point breather for less than three of its nine minutes before exploding into feral rage. Metal doesn't always need to be original, sometimes it just needs excellence in execution. In this, Spectral Wound prove themselves accomplished reapers.

FOR FANS OF: Watain, Mayhem, Sargeist

TOM O'BOYLE

SUFFOCATE FOR FUCK SAKE
Fyra
MOMENT OF COLLAPSE

Scandic post-metallers find light at the end of a long, dark tunnel

Fyra is a daunting proposition: a 12-track, 82-minute exploration of addiction, told through the perspective of four protagonists. But this Swedish post-metal septet are totally worthy of sustaining such a gruelling topic. In broad terms, SFFS mix the grinding tension of post-metal with explosive bursts of screamo – imagine a hybrid of Cult Of Luna and Birds In Row – but there are also smatterings of ambient electronica, which offer light in the shade. The Swedish voice samples peppered throughout add a sense of mystery to proceedings and whilst much of *Fyra* takes on a nihilistic hue, the melancholy moods are tempered with each of the album's four 'chapters' coming to a hopeful conclusion. *Fyra* is a dark, often bleak journey, but it's one you'll be glad you went on.

FOR FANS OF: Cult Of Luna, Envy, Birds In Row

REMFRY DEDMAN

SUMO CYCO
Initiation
NAPALM

Canadian pop metallers put more emphasis on the slick than the kick

Sumo Cyco have unleashed their third love-it-or-hate-it effort in a Marmite-esque career, but you'd be hard-pressed to admire this disjointed collection of jams. If you're in the market for deep lyrical content and mind-melting riffs, look away – but stick around if you crave forced melodies that wouldn't sound out of place on the Eurovision stage. Much like its predecessors, *Initiation* strives to reach a league well beyond its own, littered with janky guitars and try-hard vocals that constantly miss the mark – especially on *No Surrender*. It's charged with threatening intent on paper but emerges about as frightening as losing your mum in Tesco. The likes of *Bystander* and *Overdrive* might be enough to stir a live crowd, but critically fail to capture any energy on record and certainly won't occupy your thoughts for long.

FOR FANS OF: New Years Day, Falling In Reverse, Stitched Up Heart

ALI COOPER

SUPERLYNX
Electric Temple
DARK ESSENCE

Supernatural Norwegians stir their doom/psych cauldron

Norway has distinguished itself in many fields, but except for Fenriz's stoner project Valhall and Trondheim's High Priest Of Saturn, Norwegians never really applied themselves to psychedelic doom. So the field is open for Superlynx, an Oslo trio whose low-slung grooves follow a fairly familiar path through the woods where Alunah, Windhand and King Woman have frolicked before – all witchy ritualistic incantations and creeping wah-wah heroism with touches of supernatural folk horror. And they do a good job, especially on *Moonbather*, building to a compelling ritualistic climax, and *Laws Of Nature*, tugging the heartstrings with downcast profundity. But as the LP progresses, so it diversifies, with ragged blasts of garage rock and weighty cosmic Floydian textures – until drummer Ole Teigen takes over on vocals and things take a sharp turn into weird 1930s cabaret vibes.

FOR FANS OF: Jex Thoth, Windhand, Blood Ceremony

CHRIS CHANTLER

Pop Evil keep looking for their main stage break

POP EVIL
Versatile
EONE

Arena-aiming rockers buff up their credentials

MICHIGAN'S POP EVIL have claimed their seat among today's most reliably popular mainstream rock acts with a radio-friendly blend of melodic hooks and catchy choruses balanced with heavy doses of pop and R&B. Over the past decade, they've garnered enviable radio exposure and scored hundreds of millions of streams. And yet, when summer festival season arrives, it's the Five Finger Death Punches and Avenged Sevenfolds of the world claiming headliner status while Pop Evil slog away on the second stages. With their sixth and latest effort, they hope to change that.

Versatile opens with an absolute banger. *Let The Chaos Reign* unleashes a crushing industrial riff as vocalist Leigh Kakaty channels his inner Zack de la Rocha to masterful effect. The remainder of the album sees Pop Evil focusing on highly polished pop rockers with anthemic choruses, like *Stronger (The Time Is Now)*, *Set Me Free* and *Raise Your Flag*. Leigh's vocals have never sounded better and there's enough diversity here to allow him to explore his considerable vocal range, from the rapping cadence of *Work* to the towering climax of *Same Blood* to the bruising balladry of *Inferno*.

Lyrically, *Versatile* exposes Leigh's insistence on packing as many dreary clichés as possible into each album and Pop Evil's reliance on studio polish and the well-trodden formulae of mainstream rock is somewhat disappointing. To say they played it safe here would be a huge understatement. But to their credit, the album's diversity suggests that they're not afraid to risk alienating hard rock fans in favour of evolving more popular styles, not unlike Linkin Park.

Ultimately, *Versatile* is their most mature outing yet. While breaking no new ground, their gift for crafting soaring, audience-friendly anthems is immense and as the album's first few singles suggest, this might well be the one that nudges them onto the main stage.

FOR FANS OF: Five Finger Death Punch, Disturbed, Papa Roach

JOE DALY

Tetrarch have captured the spirit of nu metal

TETRARCH
Unstable
NAPALM

Atlantean upstarts reignite the nu metal revival

THE IMMINENT REBIRTH of nu metal has been predicted for five years. In that time, everyone from Vein and Northlane to Blood Youth, Ocean Grove and Loathe have taken inspiration from the subgenre's swaggering spirit. But it's only in the past few months that a crop of young revivalists has emerged looking to put a brand-new spin on the music of their formative years.

Of them all, it's Atlanta's Tetrarch who look most likely to break out as the NWONM's (Nu Wave Of Nu Metal) leading superstars. *Unstable*, their second album, is a highly polished and proficient affair, containing all the ingredients that made nu metal such a force the first time around: bouncing riffs and the kind of instantly memorable choruses that will make venues explode into sweaty, limb-flailing chaos. There's no dodgy rapping this time around, but *Unstable* is angsted up to the eyeballs. *'Looking in the mirror and I hate myself',* vocalist and guitarist Josh Fore rasps on opener, I'*m Not Right*, before the track bursts into an onslaught of monstrous grooves and a massive, Linkin Park-esque chorus that takes us right back to 2000 and hating on our parents.

You Never Listen and *Stitch Me Up* seethe with creepy, Korn-style guitars, but elsewhere Tetrarch tweak the template with a refreshing vim. The ripping solos from future guitar hero in waiting Diamond Rowe take their cues from Kirk Hammett and Mark Morton rather than Head or Brad Delson. The furious title track and *Negative Noise* are an evolution of the band's thrash beginnings, while *Addicted* pulls from pure metalcore anthemia. No doubt, *Unstable* sometimes veers a little close to homage, but it's executed with confidence and energy that elevates it way beyond a slavish throwback.

FOR FANS OF: **Korn, Linkin Park, Adema**

DANNII LEIVERS

THEM BLOODY KIDS
Radical Animals
INDEPENDENT

London agit alt-metallers bring out a sonic blunderbuss

The raw, scrappy production of Them Bloody Kids' debut album lends itself perfectly to the record's politicised lyrical content. At points, it feels like a punkier counterpart to Black Peaks' *Statues*, tapping into the same frustrations but ultimately coming up just a little too unrefined and unfocused. Nonetheless, *Radical Animals* has a charm of its own; punchy, punky riffs are fed through System Of A Down and Scars On Broadway influences alongside nu and groove metal flourishes for a chimerical approach to alt-metal. These shifts are underpinned by vocalist Sebastian Moederle-Lumb, checking in everywhere from Pitchshifter's J.S. Clayden to Serj Tankian, Billy Talent's Benjamin Kowalewicz and InMe's Dave McPherson. The diverse range is a testament to the band's ambition.

FOR FANS OF: **Black Peaks, Bad Sign, Dead Shed Jokers**

RICH HOBSON

THRONE
Pestilent Dawn
REDEFINING DARKNESS

Next-level savagery from blackened death mutants

Superficially, this Michigan quartet's sound straddles super-technical death and a more blackened strain of brutality. But some bands just push things further, and the sheer intensity of songs like *In The Midst Of Chaos* is a pitch-black wonder to behold. Steeped in the kamikaze virtuosity of Morbid Angel and Vital Remains, but played with machine-like precision, *And They Shall Weep* and *Beyond Malice* are ornate labyrinths of mutant violence, executed with psychotic commitment. The gothic horror aesthetic of much blackened death is entirely absent; even the monochrome artwork is genuinely alien and unsettling. Throne's rabid, brakes-off mentality is obscenely exciting.

FOR FANS OF: **Hate Eternal, Belphegor, Anaal Nathrakh**

DOM LAWSON

TO THE GRAVE
Epilogue
UNIQUE LEADER

Doomsaying deathcore mob add a twist to their tale

Epilogue is a remixed and remastered version of To The Grave's 2019 debut full-length, *Global Warning*, with an additional seven new songs recorded in 2020. Quite why a deathcore album recorded just a couple of years ago should need a remastered treatment is a mystery, but songs like *Ecocide* and *The Devil In Sheepskin* certainly have more punch to them on this incarnation compared with the originals. Musically, however, TTG are about as straightforward and one-dimensional as deathcore gets. The odd natural harmonic or glitch hint at something a little less primitive but otherwise, they sound like a million other deathcore bands you've already heard.

FOR FANS OF: **Cattle Decapitation, Suffocation, Brand Of Sacrifice**

REMFRY DEDMAN

GUILLERMO BRICEÑO/PRESS

VEXED
Culling Culture
NAPALM

UK alt-metal brutalists bring some depth to their charge

Having released two fearsome standalone singles, Hertfordshire's Vexed are unleashing their brand of alt-metal and hyper-focused brutality on their debut full-length. Harnessing the poignancy of personal experiences with startling technical prowess, *Culling Culture* is fierce, confrontational and packs enough depth to reveal new surprises with each listen. Menacing instrumental *Ignorant* provides the jump-off for *Hideous*, which, despite its bile-flecked vitriol, is merely a taste of the assault ahead. Vocalist Megan Targett veers seamlessly between multi-faceted cleans and seething, low-end growls, while razor-sharp raps on *Fake* and *Weaponise* are galvanised by an outrageously heavy rhythm section, ruthlessly unloading monstrous grooves by the bucketful. *Culling Culture* is a dynamic and thought-provoking statement of intent.

FOR FANS OF: Spiritbox, Brand Of Sacrifice, Jinjer

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

VOKONIS
Odyssey
THE SIGN

Sweden's progressive doom crew switch into a new key

Vokonis's progressively laced third album, 2019's *Grasping Time*, evolved their regular doomy persuasions towards more intricate, Mastodon-esque musings. They cut through the sludge with a combination of broader compositions and the addition of Simon Ohlsson's clean vocals, adding a sophisticated texture to the listening experience. On *Odyssey*, they've taken things a step further with the welcoming of Per Wiberg. The Spiritual Beggars and former Opeth keyboardist provides an unmistakable nostalgic flourish on the sprawling title track as the keyboard melodies suffuse their craggy, progressive riffs. But while the celebrity cameo definitely adds some spice to their fourth album it's those choppy, tumbling arrangements and Ohlsson's vocal melodies – a sublime counter to Jonte Johansson's bark – that brings *Odyssey* to life, especially on the rhythmic psychedelia of *Azure* and *Hollow Waters*' anthemic, ambitious stature.

FOR FANS OF: Baroness, Mastodon, Yob

HOLLY WRIGHT

VREID
Wild North West
SEASON OF MIST

Norway's prolific black'n'rollers keep their saddles blazing

Nine albums in 17 years is a pretty decent return, and Vreid are showing no signs of fatigue. A concept album that accompanies a forthcoming film project, *Wild North West* is easily the Norwegians' most accessible record, but it's also as weird and vicious as anything they've released. What really hits home here is how a few delicate embellishments – primarily old-school analogue keyboards – have injected myriad new colours into the band's fiery, strident sound. The title track is an instant anthem underpinned by a classic Vreid stomp; *Wolves At Sea* is an angst-ridden howl into the night sky, with spidery, necrotic arpeggios galore; *Spikes Of God* is a manic, spinning tunnel of dissonance menace. Best of all, *Shadowland*'s 10 minutes of warped, cartoon horror may be the finest thing these caustic cowpokes have ever written.

FOR FANS OF: Kampfar, Einherjer, Enslaved

DOM LAWSON

WARISH
Next To Pay
RIDINGEASY

San Diego's grunge-stained punk trio dial up the bile

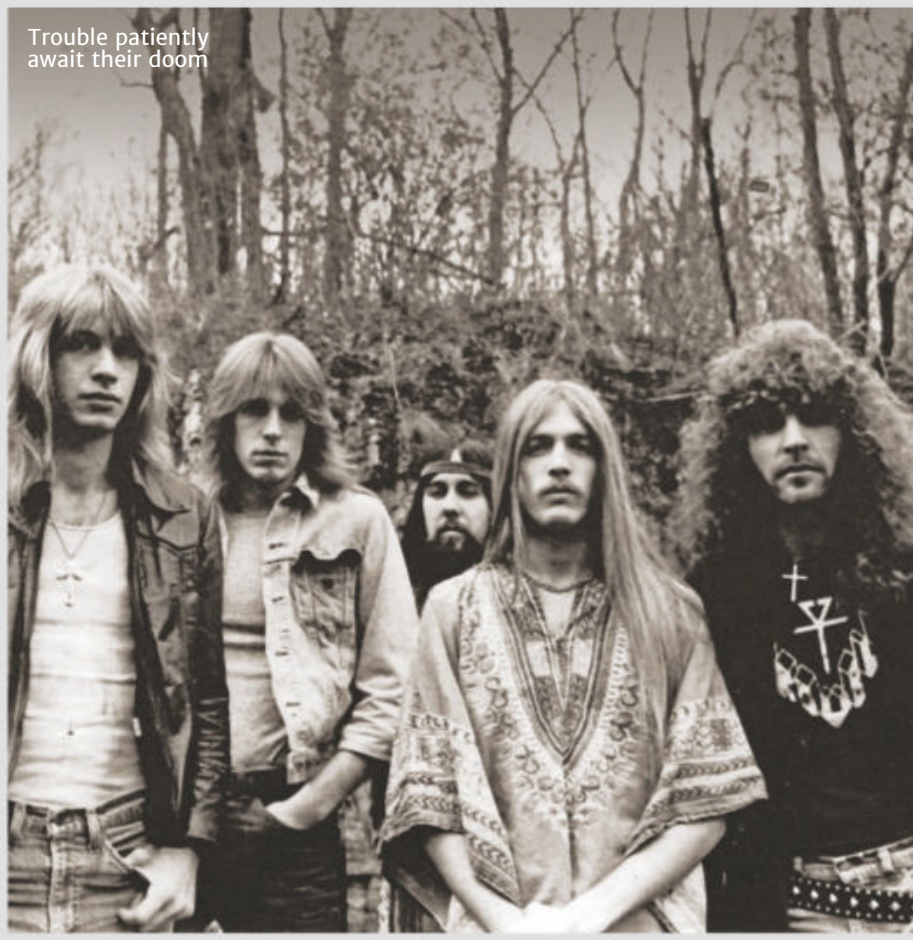
Warish have come a long way without changing much about their grubby personality. The refinement, such as it is, stems from a tightening of songwriting chops rather than any dilution of bile. Plunge yourself in at any point and you'll get exactly what you need to know about *Next To Pay*, with the band's raucous punk coming off like Nirvana or Mudhoney at their gnarliest, dosed with the occasional woozy, Sonic Youth-esque interjection. Riley Hawk's gargly jeers are matched by a careening guitar attack that suggests a midway point between The Wipers' Greg Sage and Kyuss-era Josh Homme. If things stumble slightly with a needless Gray Matter cover (nice choice though, lads) they are ultimately saved by a surfeit of vim, vitriol and hyperactive swagger.

FOR FANS OF: Nirvana, Hammerhead, Kvelertak

ALEX DELLER

RESURRECTIONS

Unearthing the latest metal reissues


Trouble patiently await their doom

FAR BEYOND SEMINAL and still indecently thrilling more than 30 years on, **TROUBLE**'s early albums are more worthy of reassessment than most. Noble folk have reissued four of their first five – *Psalm 9*, *The Skull*, *Trouble* and *Manic Frustration* (Hammerheart) **[all 9]** – and they just happen to be four of the greatest heavy metal albums of all time. Although they were soon joined by Saint Vitus, Candlemass and many others, 1984's *Psalm 9* and 1985's *The Skull* were unprecedented acts of metal heroism and flawless blueprints for the truest of doom. The band's evolution from Sabbathian purists to psychedelic explorers was seamless and mesmerising, too; 1990's self-titled effort is a riot of electrified, swaggering songcraft, while 1992s's *Manic Frustration* repeated the trick, but with a gob full of magic mushrooms. All four are utterly essential and back on vinyl, where they belong.

US legends **MANILLA ROAD** are another band with several classic albums in the bank. While 2002's *Spiral Castle* (High Roller) **[8]** is certainly no *Crystal Logic* – the band's undisputed masterpiece – it's an excellent example of the late, great Mark Shelton's militant old-school approach. Ten-minute epic *Merchants Of Death* is particularly fantastic. 1990's *The Courts Of Chaos* **[7]** is very nearly as good, and kicks off with certified live favourite *Dig Me No Grave*: four minutes of nails-hard, metal-as-fuck bluster that demonstrate precisely why Shelton was such a revered figure.

Routinely overshadowed by its Swedish neighbours, the Danish death metal scene has produced some laudably ripping bands over the years. Emanzipation have unearthed some worthy gems for resurrection. Originally released in 2000, **THORIUM**'s *Ocean Of Blasphemy* **[7]** is a gnarly, old-school knees-up with startling bursts of melody; **INIQUITY**'s *Five Across The Eyes* **[7]** is a raw but intricate onslaught of skewed tech death; and virtuoso extremists **EXMORTEM**'s *Berzerker Legions* **[8]** lives up to its title, smashing everything in sight at full pelt for 33 terrifying minutes.

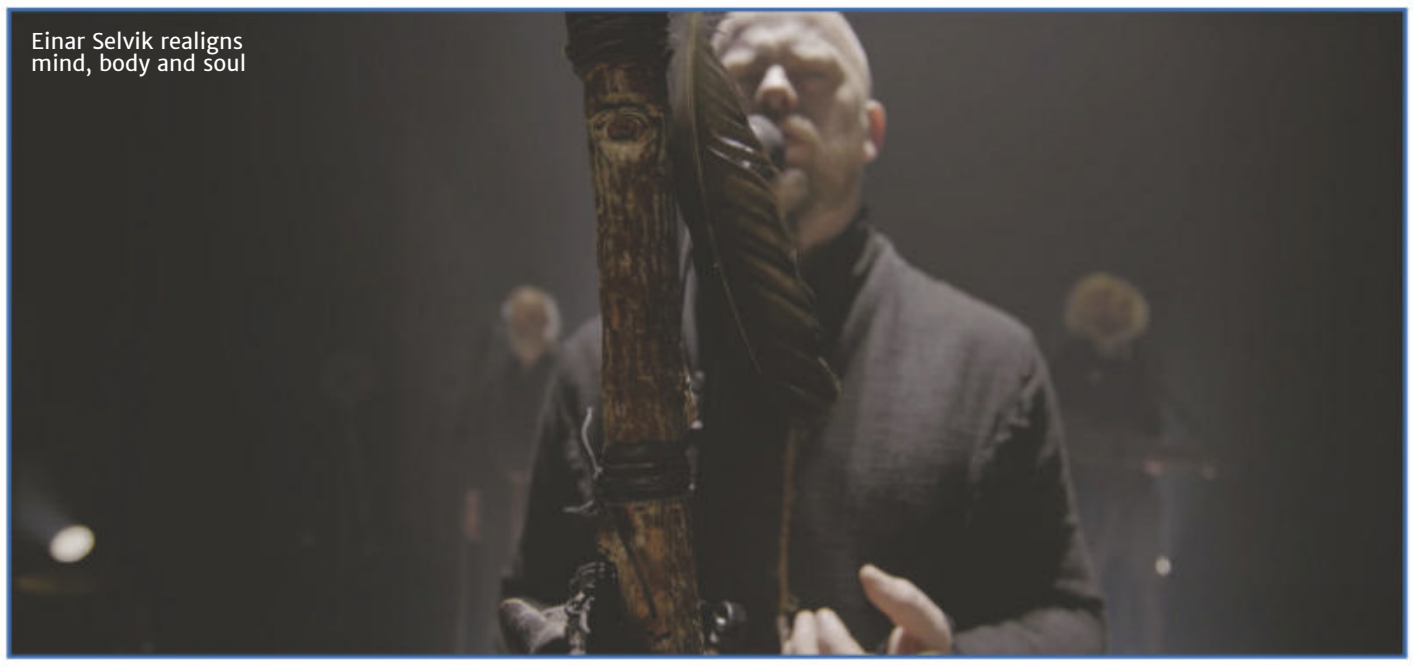
DOM LAWSON

LIVE REVIEWS

WARDRUNA

RIKSSCENEN, OSLO

Norway's continuum-revealing visionaries reawaken the senses


Einar Selvik realigns mind, body and soul

DEPRIVED BY THE pandemic of the opportunity to celebrate Wardruna's hugely successful new album, *Kvitravn* (No.1 on iTunes for its first three days, charting high globally), in an appropriately collective setting, rather than letting the moment pass, band mastermind and multi-instrumentalist Einar Selvik has opted instead to stream the event live from Riksscenen, Norway's national centre for folk music. In a pre-show interview with *Hammer*'s former editor-in-chief Alexander Milas, whose Twin V productions recently shot a series of interviews with the artist, an as-ever stoic Selvik is earnest in his intention for the show, to bring people together and in so doing evoke one of Wardruna's core tenets: collective spiritual reawakening. As Einar puts it: "We are going to try and do our best to visit you, to reach you."

A raven's call reverberates amidst icy winds as Einar and Wardruna's only other permanent member, Lindy-Fay Hella, stand to the fore with vocalist Katrine Stenbekk of Norwegian folk-pop act Kalandra, whose brilliant cover of Wardruna's *Helvegen* has nearly three million YouTube views. They're backed by the rest of the band, all clad in black, clasping ancient instruments. Ceremonies commence with *Kvitravn*'s title track, a marching introduction that underlines Einar's creative focus – not seeking to recreate music from the past but to craft something new, relevant to the modern human condition, with methods of old. Deerskin drums pound as a hypnotic rhythm is drawn from Einar's moraharpa, a keyed fiddle from the 1600s. He resonates solemnly in harmony with the striking Lindy-Fay, the raven feathers adorning her shoulders offsetting her red hair.

The rousingly harmonic *Skugge* follows, Einar reaching outward with arms and voice. You can see how much he feels it, as the camera pans to view him through the iconic eye on the deer antler-topped staff adorning his mic stand. When the tempo accelerates it's spellbinding, more séance than music, as the ritual percussion elevates the urgency. It's captivatingly catchy too, strangely bringing to mind the recent penchant for social media sea shanties and the realisation that they're broadly performing the same function: reaching into the past at a time of great social dissonance to find togetherness in time-tested, stirring harmonies.

Each of the 13 tracks performed offer uniquely captivating moments. *Solringen*'s plaintive call is hair-raising. A simple rhythm is beaten on wood, a solitary flute plays as the band stir, and Einar's repeated incantation provides the core that the other elements of nature's symphony grow and flourish around. *Bjarkan*'s low-end drone and chattering, log-beaten percussion are bound by a nurturing, resonant under-current, connecting to something beneath our existential angst. So much of the music is built around sonorous, interlacing percussion. It's primally rousing even without Lindy-Fay's bottled lightning; where Einar reassures, she startles, with spectacular, at times seemingly inhuman range.

Raido arrives to much fanfare in the comments. "It's OK to weep" says one fan; a thread full of emotional people connecting through ceremony is a vindication of Einar's intentions. *Voluspá* marks the mid-ceremony as Einar performs alone. It highlights the stark power and versatility of his rich baritone. *UruR*, named after an extinct breed of cattle, makes a spectacle of the bronze Lur, a horn that encircles the head of Eilif Gundersen and arcs upwards, evocative of the horns of the titular beast that inspires its clarion call. The lowing of cattle turns to wolven howls with *Grá*'s pared-down, percussive ravening. *Rotlaust Tre Fell* is a visceral thunderbolt. Einar theatrically gesticulates in earnest communion with the urgency they're generating, his face contorting, wild-eyed at the crescendo as he delivers his final guttural incantation, his raised hand gnarled into a claw and channelling a fearsome, dark force in contrast to the rest of the set. For closer *Helvegen*, the band stand surrounded in torchlight, bringing a primitively flickering glower to the ceremony as proceedings end with a second Einar vocal solo, closing a song sung to herald the passing from life to death that has become their signature, spinetingling finale.

Of the many livestreams during the pandemic, few have captured the electricity of a live performance. Tonight is so slickly produced, so harmonically resonant, so spiritually captivating as to eliminate the physical and technological distance, filling a hole inside you didn't realise was empty. Wardruna's magic is difficult to quantify in that to do so, to over-think rather than surrender to the moment, is to miss the point. Einar Selvik has set out to reach us, and in allowing us to disengage the head and refuel our hearts from a wellspring of naturally primal, positive energy, he and the band have achieved that triumphantly.

TOM O'BOYLE

THE SET
WARDRUNA
Kvitravn
Skugge
Solringen
Bjarkan
Raido
Voluspá
Isa
UruR
Grá
Vindavlarljod
Rotlaust Tre Fell
Fehu
Helvegen

PRESS/ M12 KULTUR / KOLIBRI MEDIA / FIMBULLJOD PRODUCTIONS. MIKKEL HAUGSRUD HAUG

Wardruna bring new meaning to the term 'global reach'

Between The Buried And Me: lounge post-hardcore meets prog, anyone?

BETWEEN THE BURIED AND ME

PRIVATE VENUE, WINSTON-SALEM, NC

North Carolina's progressive champions have a prodigal party

WITH THEIR 20TH anniversary tour remaining on indefinite hiatus, Between The Buried And Me have decided to pay a visit to the parents of drummer Blake Anderson, set up their gear in the front room and perform both *Automata* albums from 2018 in full via their official Twitch channel. With one camera fixed on Blake in his booth and a second moving freely between the other four members, it's a simple yet effective setup that captures a band at total ease with both their surroundings and material. It also offers an unrivalled opportunity to see individual moments of brilliance, like Paul Waggoner and Dustie Waring's respective solos in the fantastic *Blot* that closes *Automata I*. Additionally, without the sound variables that come with a venue show, the sound levels have been balanced perfectly – every instrument can be picked out with ease, as close to studio quality as possible, for the duration of the hour-long set.

Two tracks – *Yellow Eyes* from the first album and *The Grid* from the second – receive their live debuts and sound as if they've been live staples for years, particularly the former; the build in the second half is simply glorious and receives a number of plaudits from the onscreen chat. Elsewhere, *The Proverbial Bellow* that opens *Automata II* once more stakes its claim as the strongest song the band have written to date, a perfect blend of classic prog and 21st-century metal, *Millions* provides the perfect foil following the debut of *Yellow Eyes*, and *Glide*, with its uptempo, jive-like guitar and keyboard causes a seismic digital moshpit of emojis and capital letters. BTBAM are seldom disappointing live as it is, but this hammers that home with utmost triumph. Those anniversary shows will be off the wall.

ELLIOT LEAVER

HORRENDOUS

SAINT VITUS BAR, NEW YORK

It's always a little bit disconcerting when a death metal band smiles instead of snarls. Yet this Philadelphia band's enjoyment at playing together for the first time in a year is so infectious that it adds to the occasion as they rip through their odes to Death and Dismember. *The Stranger*'s regal melodic build opens up a set from Brooklyn's renowned Saint Vitus Bar that, while short, is big on surprises, with three songs played live for the first time. While the debut of the previously unreleased *Sentence* grabs the headlines, it's *Golgothan Times* and *Obolus* from their last album, *Idol*, that best displays Horrendous's dynamic brand of forward-thinking metal with its foot firmly entrenched in the genre's roots. Multiple camera angles allow viewers to see Jamie Knox blast away on the kit during the fiddly *Acolytes*, while all the blazing riffs and rhythmic shifts are performed impeccably, despite an almost lackadaisical approach from the guitarists and vocalists Damian Herring and Matt Knox. From the opening notes of Alex Kulick's bass to the final squalls as the denim-clad Knox writhes around on the floor, this is a death metal gig that reeks of fun rather than putrefaction.

ADAM REES

BLACK PEAKS

BRIGHTON CENTRE, BRIGHTON

Back in the days when, you know, gigs were a thing, Black Peaks shows were the amongst the most ferocious out there. Unsurprisingly, their first gig in 16 months is no different. Streaming from their hometown and facing each other across the stage, backs turned to the room of empty, socially distanced tables and illuminated by stark spotlights and bare bulbs, the effect is intense, intimate and atmospheric. And as eerie shots of the Brighton Centre's desolate bars, hallways and stairwells break up the live action, it creates a stillness that the band repeatedly shatter with their whisper-to-a-scream post metal. It seems that Will Gardner, who has unassumingly become one of the game's best vocalists, has spent lockdown gargling glass, such is the ragged force of his paint-stripping vocals on knotty opener *Aether* and *Saviour*, where his screams land amongst jagged barbs of guitar. By the climax of *Say You Will*, he's bug-eyed, arms outstretched, lost in Black Peaks' maelstrom of bruising rhythms. It's over far too soon – the band play for just 50 minutes – but the lasting feeling is of how much our industry has lost over the last year. It's an incendiary reminder of what we're fighting for.

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS

The Ocean dig deep for their first livestream

THE OCEAN

PIER2, BREMEN

Post-metal archaeologists return to an era of abundance

NOW THAT COHEED And Cambria have strayed from their Amory Wars space opera, The Ocean are prog metal's longest-serving concept album loyalists. Their last odyssey, 2020's *Phanerozoic II*, concluded a 13-year-running trilogy; picking up after *Precambrian* and *Phanerozoic I*, it finished narrating the entire history of Earth. Relishing their saga's completion, *Phanerozoic I* is getting its own livestream from the intellectuals' native Germany – with *II* to follow at the Roadburn Redux online festival.

A monolith built with progressive textures and post-metal climaxes, the 2018 opus deserves some seriously cinematic grandeur, and the evening largely accommodates. As a minimalist synth line explodes into *Cambrian II*'s groove/sludge riff, the six-piece are only backlit, often reducing them to silhouettes against flaring spotlights. The frantic flashes continue unencumbered all night and make every breakdown seem like a reality-shaking cataclysm. However, the aura is compromised by a mixing snafu early on. The opening track's first half is near-inaudible as drums crash through and drown out all else. Mercifully, by the onset of *Ordovicium*'s rabid post-hardcore, the soundscape is crystal clear.

Technical struggles or not, The Ocean themselves still shine. The climaxes of *Silurian* and *Permian* plumb new depths of savagery, the live arena making them strikingly rawer than their studio incarnations. Yet, stealing the show is frontman Loïc Rossetti. His abrupt shifts from cleans to roars continually wow, even as he slithers playfully among his bandmates. At his best, he's a match for Katatonia's Jonas Renkse before growling the house down on the dynamic *Devonian*.

Performed with flooring visuals and unyielding fire, *Phanerozoic I*'s material has never felt as muscular as it does tonight. Longtime fans have frequently lamented The Ocean's underrated status, and the band's ability to outdo themselves even in the awkwardness of isolation is testament to that unsung greatness.

MATT MILLS

PRESS/PAUL POST

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PROG
BLUES

IHSAHN

NOTODDEN TEATER, NOTODDEN

Norway's black metal poster child unleashes his full kaleidoscopic vision

LAST YEAR THE genre-fluid creative force of nature known as Ihsahn released a brace of EPs that, once again, illustrated his flair for crafting pigeonhole-busting, utterly arresting music. *Telemark* signalled a return to the Emperor frontman's BM roots, while *Pharos* saw him delve further down the rabbit hole to deliver a twisted take of pop and prog while also paying tribute to his early influences.

Tonight, in front of 20 fans in the flesh and thousands more at home, Ihsahn finally gets to perform those EPs live – plus some promised cuts from *Das Seelenbrechen*. Opening his set with *Losing Altitude*, the brooding clean vocals and hypnotic guitars lure you in from the get-go and the slow-burning number is full of intrigue and drama.

"This is a new situation for me – it's the first show I've sat down for," announces the metal maverick from his stool. While his presentation may be different, his ability to command an audience's attention remains the same. The jazzy *Spectre At The Feast* is a treat and tips a cap to *Angel Dust*-era Faith No More, as is his cover of A-ha's synth-driven oddity *Manhattan Skyline*. Boasting some beautiful vocals from Leprous's Einar Solberg, the waltzing track delivers goosebumps you could hang a hat off.

"It's time to turn the heat up a little bit," the now upright Ihsahn offers as the band deliver a blistering version of *Hiber*. While the cover of Lenny Kravitz's *Rock And Roll Is Dead* falls flat without a proper crowd, their rendition of Maiden's evergreen *Wrathchild* is wonderfully raucous. Signing off with an epic version of *Telemark*'s title track, the song is every bit as spectacular live as we hoped it would be and it was definitely worth the wait to witness it.

EDWIN MCFEE

Øystein Heide Aadland hits a purple patch

Tobias Ørnes Andersen blasts through prog, pop and black metal

TORE HANSEN X3

Ihsahn and Einar Solberg rhapsodise in blue

FIVE MINUTES WITH LAJON WITHERSPOON SEVENDUST

The Sevendust frontman talks starstruck memories, solo ventures and staying positive

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

What's the worst thing about being in a band?
"Honestly? Mostly I've been blessed!"

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
"Little Richard once told me to never give up and that he was very proud of me… and to always look good!"

When was the first time you felt like a rock star?
"At Woodstock '99 we got to hang out with everyone; I was on Willie Nelson's bus doing *everything*! Ha ha. We also got to go onstage with Red Hot Chili Peppers just as the fires all started, so ended up being rushed onto a bus. I felt like the kid out of *Almost Famous*!"

What's been your worst experience on drugs?
"We did a festival and my drum tech Norm came to me with these chocolate-covered mushrooms. So there I am, sitting on the back of the bus like a little bird and the guys came in like, 'Alice Cooper really wants to meet you!' so I had to go out and meet him tripping on shrooms! I could not stop laughing – I lost control!"

When was the last time you cried?
"That would have been this month, and the past few months, to be honest. In February we were expecting a baby and unfortunately we lost our baby boy. But there's a higher power that has a plan and everything happens for a reason so we're trying to stay positive."

What things keep you positive?
"My family, my wife – right now where I'm talking to you from, the setting; just sitting here surrounded by palm trees watching a butterfly fly by… you can't help but smile. Every day I wake up I try to find something to be thankful for and to try and find ways to bring a smile to somebody's face. It could just be saying hi, but it can mean a lot."

"I MET ALICE COOPER WHEN I WAS TRIPPING ON SHROOMS"

How's the solo record coming along?
"I'm still working on it – I've got about 13 songs so far. The main guy I write with is Sahaj [Ticotin] from the band Ra and it's been incredible working with him too. The music is incredible and isn't too far away from Ra, but going for a radio bluesy thing. I can't wait for everyone to hear it!"

You recently performed the *Home* and *Seasons* records as a livestream. What do those records mean to you?
"We were young, wild and out of control – that rock star feeling was really there. Playing with Metallica at the Silverdome with Kid Rock and Ted Nugent [on NYE 1999] was unreal. James Hetfield gave me his guitar while they played *Detroit Rock City*… and I didn't know how to play it – I was trying to figure it out in front of a sold-out Silverdome!"

What are your favourite memories of that time?
"Chino [Moreno] from Deftones came out to record the song *Bender* at the farm we were recording *Home* in. We rode horses and I think it was Chino's first time, which was pretty weird as it wasn't too long before they released *White Pony*. Maybe it's linked – who knows? It was funny to see him on the horse with his Adidas on, anyway! We also worked with [Skunk Anansie vocalist] Skin, who is so incredibly talented. Not a lot of people in the States knew who Skunk Anansie were at the time but turn the page and they had us over in the UK and it was a different world – people would be camping outside venues for three to four days before we'd even get there."

A year on from George Floyd's death and the Black Lives Matter protests, do you see much change in how society approaches race?
"The conversation has definitely changed but it'd be foolish for us to stop now when there's still so much else to do. I just gotta hope one day maybe we will achieve the level of equality we need; I don't think any guy who doesn't like me because of the colour of my skin is suddenly gonna go, 'LJ you're so cool!' – but we do all have to move in this world together, so let's try to do it in a positive way." H

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